

How to Lock Out Crime: Home Security — Exterior

In Home Security 101, you were asked to do a visual assessment of your yard and home. **Home Security — Exterior** suggests ways you can improve security around your house.

Increasing a criminal's risk of detection is an effective way to deter crime. If your home is well-lighted and visible from the street and by neighboring houses, it will be a less attractive target for burglars.

Have a look at your house through the eyes of a burglar. Stand at the end of your driveway or lane. Can you see the front door and windows clearly? Could you tell if someone was trying to break into the house?

Improve Visibility and Maintain Landscaping

Keep the landscape around the house simple and well-trimmed. Prune tree branches to six feet above the ground. Avoid tall plants around doors and windows that might help conceal someone trying to break in. Keep areas around basement windows — a favorite target of burglars — as clear as possible.

Before you begin pulling up plants, however, assess your home's overall visibility and plan your approach. The spreading juniper near the front door may only require a bit of careful pruning and extra lighting to eliminate the shadows behind it. You may be able to leave the oak tree that overhangs the garage intact; try cutting back a limb or two and installing a better lock on the second-story window.

A few such carefully chosen measures can be more effective than an all-out assault on your shrubbery.



Figure 1 Keep landscaping near the home simple and well-trimmed to eliminate potential hiding places for burglars.

Exterior Lighting

Good lighting is one of the cheapest and yet most effective measures you can take to deter break-ins after dark. With the right lighting, anyone lurking nearby or tampering with a door or window will be seen by occupants of the house, an alert neighbor or pedestrian.

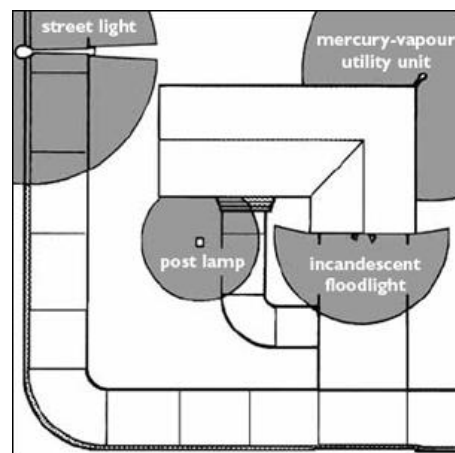


Figure 2 A well-planned outdoor lighting system makes effective use of existing street and yard lights.

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Make use of existing street and yard lights in your lighting plan. The number of lights and where they are placed will depend on the design of your home and grounds, the number and location of doors and windows and so on. For a simple rectangular home, double spotlights located at each corner and aimed along the walls might be enough. More complex structures will require more elaborate arrangements.

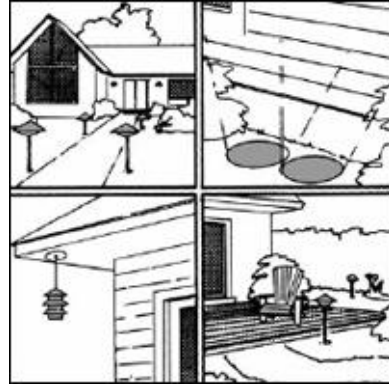


Figure 7 Types of exterior lighting.

To decide where to place lights, examine your home's exterior on a moonless night. Standing 12 – 15m (40 – 50 ft.) from the house, have an assistant wearing dark clothing move around the yard and along the sides of your home. Wherever trees or shrubs hide your assistant, prune them back. Where your simulated prowler melts into the shadows, plan to add more light. Now repeat the exercise while watching from inside the house. Look for dark "corridors" that might allow someone to approach your home unseen. You can illuminate these areas with a yard light strategically located on a post or high in a tree.

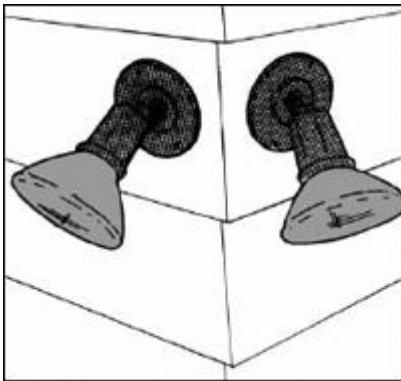


Figure 3 Mount spotlights with motion sensors at the corners of the house to illuminate a large area. Make sure the bulbs are either out of reach or protected from being removed.

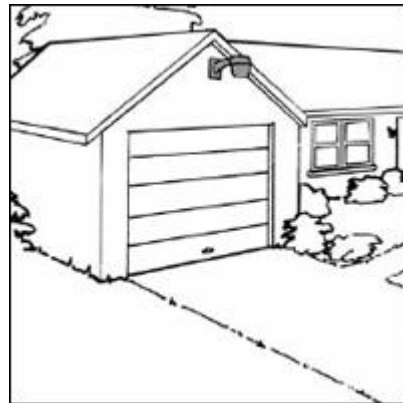


Figure 4 Floodlights mounted on a gable will illuminate a large area.

Motion-sensor lights will allow people approaching your residence at night to better see their way to your door, and to be seen as they approach. The lights will be appreciated by welcome visitors and help deter would-be burglars.

Incandescent, LED (light-emitting diode) or fluorescent floodlights mounted under the eaves or on a peaked gable are probably a better alternative. Too much light will set your house apart and give the impression that you are trying to protect something worth stealing. Protect light bulbs with a wire screen or unbreakable plastic mesh. Replace burned-out bulbs immediately.

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Aim lights downward so as not to create shadows. Prune back trees and shrubbery that block the light. Remember, too, that you want to be able to see into the yard when the light is on, both from inside the house and from the street. Locate the switch near a window, where you can look into the yard as you turn the lights on. Keep lights from shining directly into adjacent homes.

A photoelectric switch wired into the lighting grid will turn lights on at dusk and off again at dawn. You can also have a digital in-wall timer installed to vary the on/off time of your exterior lights throughout the week. This security feature is especially useful for people who are frequently away from their homes and for people on vacation. The routine of the lights going on and off suggests that somebody is home.

To save energy and money on your electricity bill, consider using energy-efficient light bulbs, such as fluorescent compact bulbs approved for outdoor use. Where a power supply may not be available or practical, consider using lights and motion sensors that are powered by photovoltaic modules (solar lighting).

Never attempt to work on a live circuit. Switch off all power to the house at a junction box and use a voltage tester to make sure the power is off before doing any work.

An electrical permit may be required. All electrical work should be checked by a qualified electrician, and may have to be inspected by your local utility.

This is especially important outdoors, where exposure to weather or ground moisture increases the risk of electrical shock.

Fences

Few fences suitable for residential use will prevent a determined burglar from entering your yard, but a fence can seriously impede efforts to get away with your valuables. Fences are also a psychological deterrent because they make a clear distinction between public and private space. In some cases, a fence is more symbolic than functional — a small corner, picket fence, for instance — but it sends the message that “this is private property.” A well-chosen fence can enhance the appearance of your home, add to your safety and even serve a more practical function, such as preventing a child or pet from wandering off.

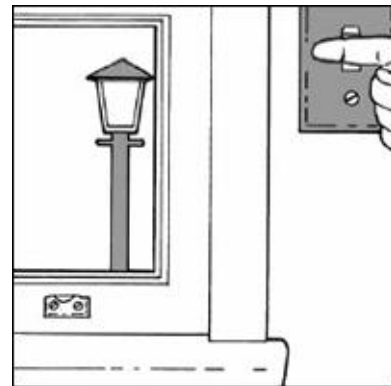


Figure 5 Mount switch for exterior lights near a window so that you can look into the yard as the light is turned on.



Figure 6 A wood-rail or wire fence allows clear visibility of your property.

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Before buying a fence, check your municipal bylaws. They may restrict the height and type of fence you can install. Choose a fence that is in keeping with the general appearance of the neighborhood and one that requires little maintenance, resists vandalism and will permit pedestrians and patrolling police to see into your yard. You might choose to wire the gate with an alarm that will alert you when it is opened.

Garages

Locks on most garage doors are inadequate and can be easily pried off. Overhead garage doors (that is, those that swing out and up) should be fitted with a sliding bolt lock.

Hinged doors can be secured by a pair of cane bolts at the top and bottom. Horizontal-paneled doors that slide along a track can be fitted with a pin that inserts into a hole drilled in the track to prevent the door from opening even if the lock is broken.

Be especially careful to secure the garage if you can get into the house through the garage. Put a deadbolt lock on the door leading from the garage into the house. Similarly, any door leading into the house from an attached greenhouse, solarium or addition should be treated as an exterior door and provided with a deadbolt lock.

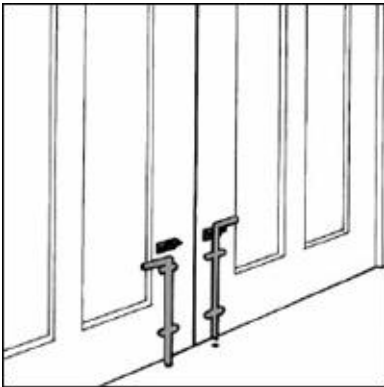


Figure 9 Cane bolts on a hinged garage door.

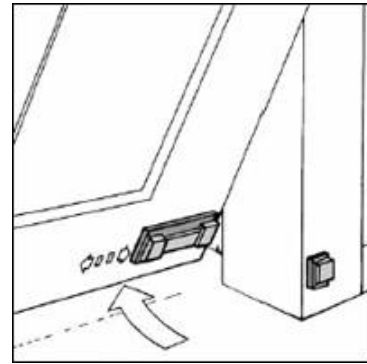


Figure 8 A sliding bolt for a garage door that swings out and up.

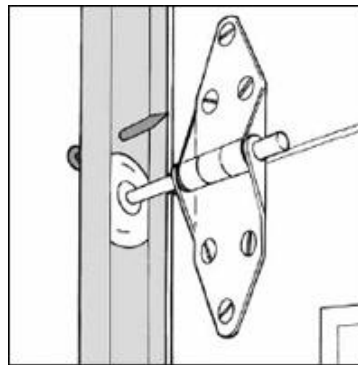


Figure 10 “Pinning” the garage door track prevents it from being opened.

Avoid wooden garage doors with thin, easy-to-break panels. If your garage door is of this type, you might be able to reinforce the panels with wood or metal braces.

If the garage has a side door, make sure it is of solid-core construction, is equipped with a good lock and the hinges and frame are well-fastened and in good repair.

Paint over garage windows or cover them with a dark curtain or blinds. Keep the area well-lit at night.

Never leave the garage door open. Burglars can simply drive in and close the door. Concealed from view, they can take their time loading up with your possessions. A well-equipped garage not only contains valuable items, but also tools and ladders that can be used to break into your home.

If your garage has an automatic door opener, be sure

it is designed not to respond to stray signals.

Disconnect the unit from the power supply if you will be away for a long time.

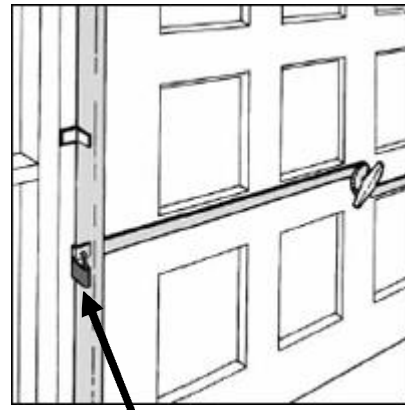


Figure 11 Drill a hole through the end of a garage door bolt and insert a padlock for extra security.

Reducing the Risk of Being a Victim

- Check the quality of doors and windows, including the frames. If the locks are sturdy and in good repair, security might be improved simply by the installation of auxiliary locks. If they are of poor quality or have deteriorated with age, they might need to be replaced altogether.
- If you have recently moved in, look for possible signs of forced entry, such as a new pane of glass set among older ones, scratches around locks or hinges, or chipped wood around windows and latches. These could be indications that the home has a history of burglaries. (*see Home Security — Windows for more information*).
- Store lawn mowers, barbecues, bicycles and snow blowers out of sight. Lock exterior basement doors and doors to cabanas, garden sheds or enclosed patios or porches. Keep ladders stored out of reach under lock and key.
- Avoid leaving your address in your car, particularly if you have an automatic garage door opener. A thief who steals your car will be able to enter your garage as well.
- Check that windows and doors are secured before retiring for the night. Pay particular attention to basement windows and sliding patio doors. In hot weather, patio doors are used so often that the last person using them will often leave them unlocked.
 - Garage door should be closed and locked.
 - Outside lighting should be adequate.
 - Maintain normal lighting throughout your house when you're not at home
 - Draw all shades at night — all window and screen locks should be adequate.
 - Trim bushes to prevent concealment.

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- Secure the basement door with a lock — use a deadbolt or hardened steel hasp and heavy padlock with hardened steel shackle.
- Secure all basement windows.
- Do not place a spare key under a mat, in a flower pot or above a door.
- If you are in the back yard, ensure that the front door is locked and vice versa.
- If you have an alarm, use it.

Esthetics versus Security

The landscape and lighting precautions described in this fact sheet don't have to be unsightly to be effective. Nevertheless, every choice you make will involve compromises between security, privacy and esthetics. A tall hedge may screen you from curious neighbors and pedestrians, but it could also provide privacy for a prowler in your yard. A new fence may improve security, but may also restrict your freedom of movement. Only you can decide what the trade-offs should be, given your location, lifestyle and real or perceived level of risk.

Conclusion

Once you have completed your security analysis and have made improvements to weak areas, take another look at the checklist (*see Home Security 101*). Go back through the list and re-evaluate your residence.

Home security is a matter of being alert, aware of your surroundings and proactive. It is not necessary to build a bunker to protect your home, but it is necessary to use common sense and take precautions. Remember that no system is 100 per cent effective, but you can take steps to considerably reduce your chances of being a target.

This fact sheet should provide ideas and alternatives to assist you in developing an effective security program. True security is a partnership between you, your family, your community and public agencies. It is only by working together that we can make our communities safer places to live.