

How to Lock Out Crime: Home Security 101

Victims of home burglary typically find the experience more than just a physical loss. They find it traumatic, disturbing and intimidating. Many are unsettled for weeks afterward, and have a feeling of being personally violated. Predictably, residential burglary happens more frequently in households where crime prevention measures have not been taken. Without making your home a virtual fortress, it is relatively easy to take effective precautions.



Figure 1 A home is burglarized in American every three minutes.

Tackling home security need not be overwhelming. The key is to adopt a problem-solving approach: analyze, implement and evaluate. This fact sheet will:

- help you recognize the basic security risks that exist in and around your home — **analysis**.
- provide ideas, alternatives and solutions so you can take appropriate steps to eliminate the risks — **implementation**.
- aid you in assessing the improvements — **evaluation**.

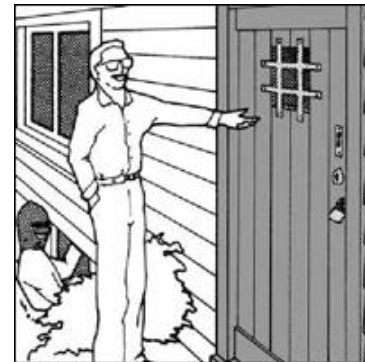


Figure 2 A planned approach is needed for good overall security.

Keep in mind that no security system is 100 per cent effective. The methods outlined here will not always discourage a professional burglar from breaking into your home. But they will, in most instances, persuade an amateur — who is by far the most frequent offender — to look for an easier target. Remember: If you have locks and alarms — use them.

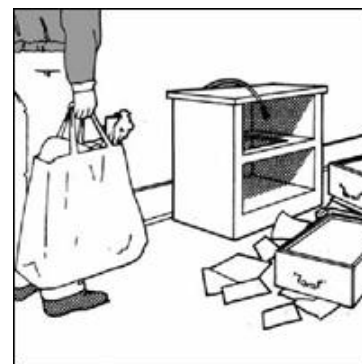


Figure 3 Never leave your home unlocked even for a few minutes, even while at home.

Knowing Your Adversary

Over 80 per cent of home burglaries occur in daylight. These crimes are most often committed by young men between 16 and 25 years of age. Most burglaries occur on weekdays between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m., when residences are most likely to be unoccupied.

Amateur burglars are opportunists. They do not choose victims randomly. Rather, they look for opportunities — houses that can be approached without neighbors seeing or hearing anything; a door left ajar; or a window propped open for ventilation. Some burglars cruise a neighborhood, working by day or night, looking for a house that seems unoccupied. If no one responds to the doorbell, they will examine the house more closely. They may test the doors and locks; note the location and type of windows; look for alarms; and so on.

The Ins and Outs of Burglary

Amateur burglary is not a sophisticated crime. To gain access to a dwelling, amateurs do not rely on deception or skill, but on concealment, speed and force. In the majority of break-ins, burglars enter the house from a door or window located in the basement or on the ground floor. However, second-floor break-ins have increased significantly in the last few years. Once inside, they steal indiscriminately, taking anything that might be valuable and can be easily carried. Burglars work quickly, often demonstrating an uncanny ability to locate hidden valuables. The average cost of goods stolen during a residential burglary is well over \$3,000.

Consumer electronics — TVs, digital cameras, computers, laptops and so on — head the list of most popular stolen items. Cash, jewelry and liquor are also “hot” items. However, and as apparent by the rise in Identity Theft crimes, they will now also focus their efforts on locating items containing sensitive personal information.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Many of the **How to Lock out Crime** suggestions are based on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. CPTED (pronounced SEP-TED) was developed in response to studies indicating that some residential designs may be more effective than others in ensuring overall community security.

For example, houses located on dead-end streets attract fewer thieves and vandals than those located on busy thoroughfares or streets laid out in a grid pattern. The limited access to dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs reduces the likelihood of strangers entering and leaving undetected. In a cul-de-sac, all houses face one another, providing more opportunity for informal surveillance by neighbors.

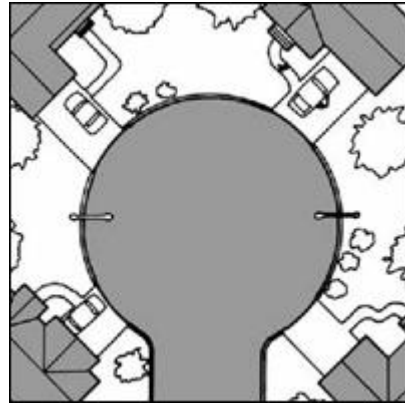


Figure 4 Circular arrangements of homes in a cul-de-sac permits informal surveillance by neighbors.

More and more developers are including the following amenities and services in their designs: fenced children’s play areas in locations where parents can watch them; recreational and open spaces that are clearly defined as semi-private; and suitable, designated places for teenagers to gather. Such amenities are important. Not only do they contribute to better quality of life, but they promote a sense of pride and ownership that acts as a “natural check” on anti-social behavior.

Houses are increasingly being provided with fenced yards. In addition to giving residents more privacy, the fence delineates property lines, conveying the message that “this is private property.”

Proper use of landscaping and lighting can be key factors in limiting and monitoring access — in all neighborhoods.

Currently in a number of U.S. communities, police, designers, planners and municipal officials are working with developers and residents to implement CPTED in new and existing neighborhoods. In fact, many developers, designers and landscapers are now CPTED certified to design and build to these specifications. When building or remodeling you may wish to ask if the contractor holds such certifications.

Is Your House a Target for Burglars?

In choosing a target, a burglar will generally narrow the focus from neighborhood, to street, to house. Deterring the criminal at any one of these stages is key to your home’s security.

Looking at the following three areas, from a burglar’s perspective, will start you thinking about what improvements are required in your community and home:

Neighborhood

What makes your neighborhood an attractive target for a burglar? Burglars tend to operate where they feel most comfortable, whether it be in an upper-, middle- or lower-income neighborhood. They target houses that will provide them with a high possibility to enter and exit undetected.

Home burglaries are more frequent in neighborhoods where people are constantly moving in and out and where there may be a lot of rental property, because there is little chance of being recognized as “someone who does not belong.”

Street

Once the neighborhood has been chosen, burglars will then pick a street. What factors influence their decision? The same rationale used in selecting a neighborhood applies when choosing a street.

Burglars will opt for streets that offer the best escape routes. Houses located near ravines or wooded areas, on corners, on busy streets or near subway stations are at higher risk. These locations provide an intruder with easy escape routes.

House

What makes your home attractive to a burglar? If a burglar is considering your neighborhood and street, you want to make sure your house is not at the top of the list. If the choice is between your house and one down the street, access will be the deciding factor.

There are a number of visual factors that a burglar uses when targeting potential houses:

- Are possible points of entry and exit hidden? (Can I get in and out without being seen?)
- Is anybody home? (Clues: excessive mail, newspapers and flyers piled up at the door and overgrown grass.)
- No visible evidence of an alarm system. (Can I remain “anonymous”?)
- Signs of disrepair or neglect. (Clues: doors, windows and locks are of poor quality or are in need of repair, basement and main floor windows are left open or unlocked, the yard and landscaping is unkempt.)
- Valuables are visible from the street. (Are the goods worth the risk?)

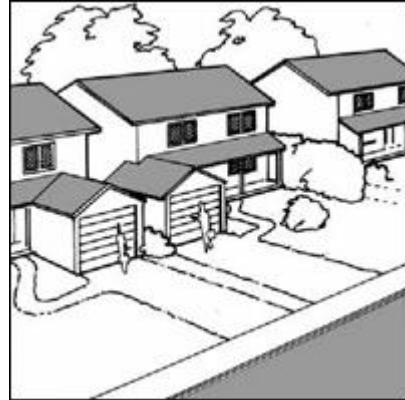


Figure 5 Residential designs that promote neighborhood cohesion can enhance overall security.

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Where to Begin

You now know what a burglar is looking for in a target. Using the following checklist, evaluate your home and neighborhood — during the day and at night, both inside and outside the house — through the eyes of a burglar.

Home Security Checklist

If your answer is “no” to any of the following questions, further action may be required.

Surroundings		
	Yes	No
Does your neighborhood have a sense of community and pride? Do neighbors look out for and care for one another?		
Are the house and the grounds visible from the street and by neighbors?		
Is the perimeter of your property marked to discourage trespassers?		
Are entranceways illuminated at night? Are the bulbs for these lights protected?		

Exterior		
	Yes	No
Is shrubbery well-located and maintained, allowing unrestricted views of exterior entrances and windows? Are entrances and windows free of other obstructions?		
Are exterior doors and frames sturdily built? Could they withstand being kicked, or otherwise broken down?		
Are inner locks inaccessible in the event glass in or near the exterior door is broken?		
Is the door hardware (for example, locks, latches, handles, hinges, strike plates) durable and securely installed? Are hinge pins protected or located where they can't be removed from the outside?		
Does the front door have a viewer that lets you see who is at the door before you open it? Is there a second viewer installed lower on the door for young children to use?		
Are patio doors “grounded” in their tracks? Is the locking mechanism effective?		

Is the garage door kept locked? Are tools and ladders kept where they cannot be accessed by a burglar/thief?		
Are basement and ground-floor windows equipped with adequate locks? Are windows of good quality, within solid frames and sashes?		
Are second-story windows that might be reached (for example, from the garage roof, TV tower, ladder or overhanging tree limb) properly secured?		
If you were away, would the house still look occupied? If yes, what would make you think so?		

Interior		
	Yes	No
Are all interior doors leading to the exterior (for example, basement, garage, solarium) routinely locked and of solid core construction?		
Are valuables marked <i>and</i> photographed for identification, insured and securely stored? Are valuable items kept in a bank vault or a security box?		
Do you take reasonable security precautions when leaving the house for the day? for a vacation? to go to the corner store?		
Do family members and neighbors know what security precautions you have taken? Do they have good security habits so when they may be asked to look after your home; you know your home is secure?		
Can children living in the home reach and operate all security features in case they need to escape in case of fire or other emergency?		
Do you know your neighbors and their phone numbers?		
Is the phone number for the local police department clearly posted at every telephone?		
Could security be improved by installing a suitable alarm?		

Assess — Then Address

Assessing your home's security is an important initial step in crime prevention. Essentially, your home should look protected, well-maintained and appear to be occupied at all times. Upon completing the checklist, most homeowners will find that there are many areas requiring attention.

The next step is to make improvements.