

Protect Your Home from Burglars

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Here's the inside scoop on the most effective ways to protect your home and family from unwelcome intruders.

Doors:

Choose metal exterior doors. If this is not possible, choose a solid wood door instead of a composite one.

- Make sure door hinges are located inside so doors can't be removed from the outside.
- If your mail slot is in your door, make sure a hand can't reach through the slot to the doorknob or locks.
- For sliding glass doors, install a device that secures both the sliding and stationary panels of the door by pinning them together where the frames overlap.
- Change your locks when you move into a new or existing home. You never know who had access to the home or who may still have keys to it.

Windows:

- Don't use crescent or "butterfly" latches to secure double-hung windows. They can be pried open easily with a knife. Use a do-it-yourself nail or bolt window stop instead. Drill the hole for the stop at a slight downward angle to prevent a burglar from jiggling the pin out of the hole under pressure.
- Laminated-glass windows, which can only be cut from one side, foil another burglary method: Quietly cutting glass to gain entry. Laminated security glass products may be specified for virtually any application, regardless of concurrent requirements for heat-transfer, visibility, or aesthetics. They are especially appropriate for front-door windows and sidelights.
- One ill-advised "security" treatment is the application of film to windows. Window films have never passed tests necessary to certify them as resistant to forced entry, and windows with a daylight application of film — one that is unanchored and adhered to the glass surface only — are actually easier to break than their unfilmed counterparts.
- Windows that are never used — unless they are a means of escape during a fire — should be fastened permanently shut.

General Tips:

- Pay attention to items that could allow easy access to second-floor windows or balconies. If you're remodeling or painting the exterior of your home, put ladders away at the end of each day.
- Make it difficult for an intruder to hide; trim bushes and trees to allow maximum exposure of windows and doorways.
- Motion-detection lights on all sides of the house can also make your home less inviting to burglars.
- Don't hide your house key outside. If a family member habitually loses or forgets his or her key, develop a better strategy — perhaps giving a set of keys to a trustworthy neighbor, or hanging the key on a long chain that a teen can wear around the neck.

- Lower the volume of your telephone's ring so it can't be heard outside your house. (An unanswered phone tells a burglar casing your house that no one's home.)
- Don't enter your home if it appears to have been burglarized; call the police from a cell phone or neighbor's house.

Alarm Systems:

According to the FBI, homes equipped with centrally monitored alarm systems are 15 times less likely to be targets of break-ins. These steps will help you choose one that's right for your security needs.

1. Determine how much protection you need.

The goal of a residential security system is to detect an intruder as early as possible, alert the home's occupants to his presence, and scare him away before he does any harm. Progressive layers of protection accomplish this goal. Imagine four concentric circles around your house, with your family and your most valuable possessions at the center. The interior of your home is the second layer, the exterior shell of your home is the third, and the property around your home is the fourth.

For most people, a system that protects the second and third circles is both effective and cost efficient. This involves sensors on the windows and exterior doors, with interior motion detectors as backup to the point-of-entry protection. The additional cost of protecting the innermost circle adds spot protection for high-value areas, such as a security closet or safe; at this level the system will include 24-hour panic buttons. At the outermost circle of protection, motion sensors let you know when someone has come onto your property. Unless you live in a remote or hidden location, this protection is likely more than you need for the costs involved.

2. Decide how you want the system to respond.

At a minimum, include one interior siren to scare off the burglar and alert you to the situation. You may want to add an exterior siren so that the neighbors know when your alarm is activated. Also, consider whether you want the system monitored by a central station.

3. Choose a type of alarm system.

A basic alarm system is a low-voltage electrical circuit with sensors installed on doors and windows. When the flow of electricity through a sensor is interrupted because the door or window is opened, a siren sounds or a light flashes. Many systems also include motion sensors. When something moves within the sensor's range, an alarm sounds. Some systems are monitored systems, meaning they send a signal to a central station where operators, in turn, notify police.

Electronic alarm systems come in two basic types:

1. Wired systems require running low-voltage electrical wires from a master control panel to doors and windows, motion detectors, keypads, and sirens. The wires are usually concealed inside walls and in crawlspaces. Professional installers can hide the wires.
2. Wireless systems use miniature radio transmitters instead of wires, so very little drilling and no special tools are required for installation. You can take a wireless system with you when you move. A wireless system is a better do-it-yourself choice.

Both wired and wireless systems can be enhanced with a variety of options — from motion detectors that aren't tripped by pets to remote access that allows you to check the system by phone.

4. Compare prices.

Get bids from two or three reputable security companies in your area. Be sure to compare not only the installation charges but also annual inspection costs and monthly fees (for monitored systems). Also, check with your insurance agent to see if you'll receive a discount for installing a certain type of system.

5. Use it right.

Alarm systems are only a part of good home security, and electronic systems have to be used properly to be effective. Solid doors and locks, as well as security-smart lighting and landscaping, are still important as well.

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