



# St. Joseph County Sheriff's Office



## Tips for Home Safety

### Introduction

Of all the major criminal offenses, residential burglary is perhaps the most common. A burglary is reported every 15 seconds in the United States. Burglars entered more than 2.1 million homes in 1995. Two out of every three burglaries were residential in nature and at least one home in twenty in the United States was burglarized in 1995. Criminalists say that if all break-ins were reported, the number would be more like one in four. The average victim reportedly lost about \$535, but all losses typically are not listed in police reports. Sixty-seven percent of all burglaries involve forcible entry, with over half (52%) occurring during the daylight hours. Fortunately, there has been a decline in burglary rates in recent years. Residential burglary, however, continues to be a serious problem.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics defines household burglary as “unlawful or forcible entry or attempted entry of a residence.” This crime usually, but not always, involves theft. The illegal entry may be made by force, such as breaking a window or slashing a screen, or may be without force by entering through an unlocked door or an open window. As long as the person entering has no legal right to be present in the structure a burglary has occurred. Furthermore, the structure need not be the house itself for a burglary to take place; illegal entry of a garage, shed, or any other structure on the premises also constitutes household burglary. If breaking and entering occurs in a hotel or vacation residence, it is still classified as a burglary for the household whose member(s) were staying there at the time the entry occurred.

The majority of residential burglaries about 85% are carried out by youthful amateurs, mostly males under 25 years of age, of normal intelligence, with a record of juvenile delinquency and a minimum of education. Most residential burglaries are crimes of opportunities. The burglars devote relatively little time to advance planning. If their advance checking and examination of the potential target reveals a risk greater than anticipated, they often move onto what they perceive to be a safer or easier target. Thus, the more the homeowner does to keep the home from looking like an easy target, the safer the home usually is. This chapter will provide crime prevention tips and recommendations homeowners can adopt to improve the safety and security of their residences.

### Exterior

#### Lighting

It is a recognized fact that good lighting is a deterrent to crime. Lighting lets the homeowner see the pathway they take from their vehicle to the house. It permits them to see as they stop at the door to use their house keys. Effective lighting also forces the intruder to work in an area where he may be exposed and reported to the police.

#### Around The House

All sides of the home should be protected by security lighting that is located high out of reach and is vandal resistant. The best possible location for exterior residential lighting is under the eaves of the house. This makes ground-level assault more difficult. Such lighting should ideally be controlled by photo-electric cells that will activate them during times of darkness.

### **Over Entry Doors**

Each door should be equipped with a light that provides quality illumination in the vicinity of the door, including both sides of the door and porch.

### **Carports And Garages**

Lighting in carports and garages is critical. For garages, an automatic garage door opener is the best choice. Almost every garage door opener made today has a light that comes on when the opener is activated, lighting the interior of the garage. In carports, it is recommended either to leave the light on, have the light on a timer, or have a light connected to a motion sensor or photo electric cell.

### **Light Controls**

Security lighting should be automatically controlled by photocell. Unfortunately, many exterior light fixtures are controlled by an interior switch which can be ——— and often is ——— turned off by an occupant or simply never turned on in the first place. Photocell bases which screw into the bulb socket are available at minimal cost. The bulb is screwed into the photocell base. From that point on, the light will illuminate automatically as the sun goes down. To insure the light is not accidentally extinguished, a cover can be placed over the inside switch or the switch can simply be removed altogether.

### **Motion Lighting**

Motion detection lighting is strongly encouraged, particularly in areas where lighting may be considered intrusive to neighbors. Costing less than \$50.00, such units are often direct replacements for existing fixtures and can be selectively aimed to detect motion of an approaching intruder and cause the light to activate. This does two things: first, the sudden presence of the light startles the intruder, leaving him exposed to view; and second, the light provides a friendly means to light pathways as the homeowner returns in the evening. While there may be a concern that dogs, cats or birds will trigger the sensor and cause the lights to come on, if the resident sets the sensitivity of the sensor correctly, this should not be a problem.

### **Landscaping And Plant Materials**

Bushes, trees and shrubbery can conceal an intruder as he attempts entry into a window or door; or worse yet, as he waits in hiding for the homeowner! A few alterations to the home's landscaping and plant materials can be enough to discourage intruders. To avoid being seen or caught, intruders look for property they can get into and out of quickly. Their ideal target is a house surrounded by large hedges or shrubs, which serve to hamper visibility from the street and neighbor's houses.

Trim shrubbery and trees so doors and windows are visible to neighbors and from the street. Trimmed landscaping should not provide concealment for criminals. If the home has a second floor, prune trees so they can't help a thief climb in second floor windows. Place trellises where they can't be used as ladders to gain entry to upper floors.

- Ground plants (shrubbery and bushes) within four (4) feet of any sidewalks, driveways, doors or gates, should be maintained at a height of not more than two (2) feet.
- Ground plants between four (4) feet and eight (8) feet of any sidewalks, driveways, doors or gates, should be maintained at a height of not more than four (4) feet.
- Ground plants under windows should be maintained at a height that is below the window sill.
- Trees should be trimmed so that the lower branches are more than six (6) feet off the

ground.

- Place large gauge gravel on the ground near windows. The noise caused by an intruder walking on it can be a psychological barrier. *Do not* place large rocks or other items near glass windows or doors. These could provide the burglar with his tools!
- Plant spiny (thorny) plants along fences and under windows. Such plants will discourage the possible burglar. Protecting with spiny plants can be almost as effective as using barbed wire, and a lot more attractive.

### **Limiting Access**

Intruders look for homes that have few or no obstacles blocking a quick exit. Fences can prevent burglars from carrying away large items if the gates are locked. Fence gates should be locked at all times, even when the owner is at home. Ladders and tools should be stored in a garage or a storage shed, and these facilities should be locked.

### **House Numbers**

House or street numbers on a home should be easily visible from the street. Critical time can be saved by emergency responders when the street address for the house is visible from a distance.

- **On the House**
  - Use numbers made of reflective materials, or black on white, that are 6 inches high.
  - Keep numbers looking new and clean and replace when necessary.
  - The numbers should be placed under a light and near the front door or garage entrance.

### **Electric Power Entrance**

Exterior electric panels often contain disconnect switches which can totally shut off power to the house. Electrical panels should be checked to insure that they are equipped with a disconnect switch lock or other provision that makes it difficult to extinguish power. The homeowner should be encouraged to install a number of wall mounted rechargeable hand-held flashlight units with base chargers at various locations in the house, including all bedrooms and primary living spaces.

### **Telephone Entrance**

Accessible lines permit telephone service, and thus the ability to call for help, can be severed by simple wire cutters. Where possible, these lines should enter the home high so as to be less susceptible to tampering. If the telephone line must remain accessible, some protection may be afforded by installing the line in rigid conduit and termination points in lockable containers. The best protection, however, is a cellular telephone that can be used should the telephone lines be taken out of service.

### **Doors**

Doors are usually the burglars first choice of entry into a home. Believe it or not, some residents leave exterior doors unlocked . . . particularly children who may be the last to leave. In other entries, the burglar simply breaks a door or a side light and reaches around to unlock a door.

### **The Door**

Exterior doors should be of solid core (wood, not composite materials) or steel, 2 3/4" thick is preferred. Hollow core or wood panel doors can be easily broken. Such doors, however, can be reinforced by attaching at least 20 gauge (approximately 1/32" thick) sheet metal on the exterior side of the door. If this method of strengthening the exterior door is

used. attach the sheet metal with carriage bolts, spacing no further than 16" apart, around the perimeter of the door attach the sheet metal with carriage bolts, spacing no further than 16" apart, around the perimeter of the door. If an exterior door is equipped with glass within arm's length (about 40") of the door lock, break resistant polycarbonate glazing material (similar to plexiglass) attached to the inside of the door around the sides will provide considerable delay. Entry doors should fit their frames tightly, with no more than 1/8" clearance between the door and the frame. Door frames should be solidly anchored to the rough opening. There are often spaces left between the rough opening stud at a point midway up the door jamb. These spaces create a poor anchorage for hardware making the door easy to kick open. If possible, the door molding should be removed and these spaces should be filled or "shimmed" prior to mounting any new lock strikes. If the door opens inward, the stop strip should actually be part of the wood frame, not applied. The stop strip is a wood strip installed on or milled into the door jamb (it's the part of the jamb that the door closes on). If the stop has been applied (strip nailed on the jamb), pry it off carefully and coat the surfaces with epoxy cement. Then hammer the stop back in place and further secure it with tapered wood screws installed directly in front of the lock bolts. This will make it difficult for a burglar to pry up the strip and manipulate the lock from the exterior.

### **Door Viewer**

Entry doors should have wide angle (180°) door viewers to permit the occupant to see callers without opening the door. Such door viewers are inexpensive and easy to install

### **Strike Plates**

The strike plate is attached to the door frame. The metal bolt of the door lock slides into the strike plate to secure the door to the door frame. Heavy duty strike plates, installed with long screws (ideally, at least 3"), offer good resistance against force. Strike plates and boxes should be installed with screws long enough to reach the stud behind the jamb. Replace weak strike plate with High Security Strike Plate. Fasten with long screws. This will also strengthen the frame system. Replace weak strike plate on wood frames with High Security Strike Box.

### **Hinges**

If an entry door swings outward, the knuckles of the hinges must be exposed and it may be possible to remove the hinge pins to gain entry. One solution to this problem is to replace hinges that have removable pins with hinges having non-removable pins (available at hardware stores). Another solution is to remove the two opposing screws (door and frame side) from the top and bottom hinges. Then insert a large finishing nail in the screw hole on the frame side, but do not hammer the nail in all the way; instead leave the head of the nail exposed 1/4" to 1/2" above the surface of the hinge. Close the door slowly and insure the exposed nail meets and extends into the screw hold on the opposite hinge.

### **Sliding Glass Doors**

Sliding glass doors (sometimes referred to as acacia doors) are easy for a burglar to enter if no remedial action is taken. Often, the door panels can simply be lifted out of the tracks. To deal with this problem, open the active door and install a number of wood screws in the track, allowing the screw to project down 3/8" to 1/2" or so. Slide the door closed, making sure the extended screws pass freely over the top rail of the door. Now try to lift the door from the track; upward movement should be stopped by the screws before the door can clear the bottom track. Once the door has been secured from lifting, an auxiliary lock is needed because more than likely, the standard lock supplied with the door is nothing more than a small hook bolt that can easily be forced open. Locking bars (commonly called the "Charlie Bar") are ideal for this purpose; but a length of dowel — an old broom or mop handle,

for example — can also be placed in the bottom track to keep the door from being pushed open. The dowel should be cut to a length so it fits snugly in the track between the wall and the door frame. If ventilation is needed, another dowel could be cut a few inches shorter to permit the sliding door to be opened no greater than six (6) inches. There are also a number of commercially produced locking devices for sliding glass doors. Those operated by keys are recommended for better security.

### **Garage Doors**

The failure to close and lock the garage door often presents the most serious security problem in the home. This should always be emphasized to the homeowner. The following are a series of recommendations related to garage door security:

- The garage door should be locked at all times (even when the occupant is at home);
- Overhead track operated doors are best secured with electronic door openers. They should be of the type that can be disconnected from inside the garage in the event the home is unoccupied for long periods of time;
- A good case hardened padlock on which both ends of the shackle engage, should be used to secure the garage door;
- For garage doors with overhead tracking, drill holes into the track above a roller with a pin or padlock inserted through the slot;
- For garage doors that are counter-balanced, secure with two case-hardened hasps and padlocks bolted onto both sides of the door;
- For garage doors that have a double out swing, mount heavy duty slide bolts to the inside of one door at the top and bottom to make it stationary. A case hardened hasp and padlock can then be bolted on to secure the active door to the inactive door;
- The door leading from the garage into the home should be a solid wood or metal core door and should have a good quality deadbolt lock on it;
- If a garage door has a “doggie door,” this can be a means of access for a burglar;
- Homeowners should be cautioned not to leave garage door openers in vehicles parked outside, as they can obviously be used for easy access into the garage.

### **Locks**

#### **Key-In-Knob Lock**

A key-in-knob lock offers privacy and convenience but does not offer security from intruders. They can be easily compromised by wrenching the knob with hands or vice grips, using credit cards or plastic to slip the spring bolt or by simply kicking open the door.

#### **Deadbolt Lock**

A deadbolt lock can provide good protection for an entry door. When the key is turned, the lock mechanism slides a strong metal bolt from the door into the frame.

When purchasing a lock, the following points should be covered:

- The bolt should extend at least 1" from the front edge of the door (a 1" throw)
- The connecting screws that hold the lock together should be on the inside of the door.
- The strike plate should be attached to the door frame with screws that measure at least 3" in length.
- The cylinder should have a steel guard — a ring around the key section. The cylinder guard should be tapered or rotate around the key section (if twisted) to prevent wrenching.

### **Auxiliary Rim Mounted Lock With Deadbolt**

This lock can be attached to a door's surface with long sturdy screws. The locking device on the door fits into the plate on the frame. When the key is turned, strong metal bars join the two parts of the lock.

### **Double Cylinder Deadbolt Lock**

This lock can be placed on doors with glass panels or on other doors, as well. The locks can be opened only with a key from either side. The key should be kept near the door but not reachable from the glass panel. Some states and local jurisdictions have, for reasons of fire safety, passed laws or ordinances that prohibit the installation of double cylinder deadbolt locks in residences. The law in each jurisdiction should be reviewed before they are recommended.

### **Keys**

Improper attention to the issue of keys can lead to a burglary. The following are suggestions to better insure keys are properly controlled:

- When someone moves into a previously occupied home, all exterior doors should be rekeyed;
- Homeowners should keep their keys secured at all times. They should take their keys with them when they leave the apartment or condominium and keep them in their pocket or purse;
- Keys should never be loaned, particularly where strangers are involved. House keys should be placed on a dual key ring that will permit easy separation from the car key. When keys are surrendered in connection with service or valet parking, only the car keys should be left.
- Keys and key rings should not be marked or identified in such a way so they can be switch functions on automobile and refrigerator doors.

### **Foiling**

Foil, or tape, is a ribbon of metallic material that is attached to various surfaces such as glass, door panels, walls, etc. The foil is designed to break when an attempt is made to gain entry through the surface to which it is attached, thus causing the alarm to sound.

### **Vibration or Shock Detectors**

These special sensing devices are set to react to vibrations similar to those that result when an attempt is made to break the surface to which they are attached. They can be used on walls, doors and particularly on windows, but proper attention to design must be exercised for problem free operation in the home.

### **Screens**

Specially designed "insect" screens are also available to cover windows and other openings. These screens contain inconspicuous, built-in alarm wire to protect against entry through the screen material, and are also installed so an alarm will sound if the screen is removed from the opening while the system is on. While there are a great variety of interior detection devices available, only a limited number are usually considered suitable for residential use.

### **Pressure Mats**

Generally used under rugs or carpets, these mats are really flat “switches” that react to pressure from footsteps. Placed on doorways, hallways, windowed areas and staircases, they can be used ideally to isolate desired areas.

### **Photoelectric Beams**

When specifically designed for residential use, these beams are small and unobtrusive, and in some cases, are designed to resemble standard wall outlets. They cast an invisible infrared light beam across hallways, rooms, stairwells, etc., and when the beam is broken, the alarm sounds. Although more costly than pressure mats, the rather considerable length of beam can compensate in some installations by allowing large areas to be protected by a single device.

### **Passive Infrared Systems**

This type of device measures the infrared heat generated within the protected area. An individual passing through the area, generating body heat, would be detected by the sensor. This type has proven to be more reliable than other forms of motion detection and is less susceptible to false alarms.

### **Motion Detectors (Ultrasonic, Microwave)**

These devices are designed to detect motion within the specific area. They operate by filling an area with ultrasound or microwaves that are “observed” in a specific preset pattern. A person entering the pattern, in sustained motion, changes the pattern. This change triggers the alarm system. Since they are quite sensitive to a wide variety of conditions, care must be exercised in installation in order to avoid frequent false alarms. Therefore, proper attention must be paid to the location of existing air conditioning and heat vents, telephones, loose fitting windows, etc. before a decision to use these devices is made.

### **Proximity Devices**

These devices are very effective in protecting specific objects such as safes, file cabinets or works of art.

### **Panic Buttons**

These devices are small buttons that may be located at various spots within the home, particularly alongside entrance doors, and next to beds. Portable panic buttons that operate in a manner similar to garage door opener transmitters are also available. Such devices usually have a range between 250 - 350 feet and are most useful when the user moves from room to room within the protected area. They allow the occupant to manually activate the alarm system if they suspect an intruder. Care must be exercised in locating these buttons so they aren't pushed by children or curiosity seekers.

### **Controls and Annunciation**

Controls for an alarm system consist of a panel and a keypad into which a code number that arms or disarms the system is entered. Controls also perform other functions that allow flexibility in how and when an alarm system is armed or disarmed. The annunciation part of the system is the element that sounds the alert of the intrusion.

### **Important Things To Look For In A Residential Alarm System**

- An alarm system must have a reliable power supply. The most dependability is provided by a system that operates on household electric power, with emergency backup power provided by a battery to assure operation during power interruption. A rechargeable means of automatically reporting battery failure should be included. A service and maintenance contract that includes automatic battery replacement is highly desirable.
- Some visual or audible signal should be provided to notify or alert the homeowner of a malfunction in the system prior to operation.
- Any components that can turn the system on or off or render it otherwise inoperative or ineffective should be tamper resistant.
- All components and installation methods should meet the requirements of all applicable local standards, regulations and codes.
- An installed alarm system should carry a warranty covering parts and labor, from both the manufacturer and installer for a period of no less than one year from the date of installation.
- The installation company should by contract be required to provide service and repairs on a prompt basis.
- Upon installation of an alarm system, the homeowner should be thoroughly knowledgeable of what it does and what it does not do. They should be made familiar with all the details of operating the system and receive verbal as well as written instructions covering all possible circumstances involving the alarm system.

### **Selecting The Right Alarm Company**

The alarm installation field is one of the country's fastest growing industries. While there are many experienced, reputable and reliable alarm installation companies, there are also those that are less than reputable and who will take advantage of the homeowner. An alarm installation company should ideally be well established and have a verifiable record of successful operation. To check on an alarm installation company, the homeowner can possibly contact the local police and fire departments, the Better Business Bureau, the Consumer Protection Agency or the Chamber of Commerce. This background checking should be done *before* the company is invited into the home. Employees of an alarm installation company who have access to a home should be bonded. It is also advisable to obtain a list of satisfied customers and to contact them directly.



### **Inexpensive Alarm Protection**

There are a number of self-contained alarm systems useful to the homeowner who does not want the benefits of a full-featured, professionally installed system. These small units can be installed on a wall in a corridor or near a protected door or window and sound a loud local alarm if violated. It should be noted, however, that such devices are intended only to alert occupants and to startle an intruder; they should not be used for, nor are they intended to be used to call the police.

### **False Alarms**

A large percentage of electronic alarms reported to police departments are false. For the sake of publication, a “false alarm” is defined as any alarm activation *not* caused by an intruder. False alarms waste police resources, add unnecessary risk to the responding officers and the public in general.

### **How To Reduce False Alarms**

The following are measures or steps the occupant or tenant can take to reduce false alarms in multi-residential housing:

- If the occupant accidentally activates the alarm, they should advise their alarm monitoring company immediately. They need to memorize their pass code.
- All alarm users should be trained to use the system and know the codes to arm and disarm the system; including how to cancel a false alarm.
- All loose fitting doors and windows with sensors should be tightened. A loose fit may break the sensor contact, even without opening the door/window. Hinges and strike plates should be adjusted so the door can move no more than 1/4".
- Do not have anything that will move (pets, plants, balloons, etc.) or stir the air (fans and heaters) in a room that is protected with a motion detector.
- Have wide-gap sensors installed on all doors.
- Have the sensitivity settings on motion detectors and glass-breaking sensors adjusted so unwanted sounds or items do not activate them.
- If an alarm system is activated by a storm, it should be subsequently checked and adjusted.
- It can be arranged for an alarm monitoring company not to dispatch the police for interior motion sensor activations without having other sensors activated. This is known as “double sensor” dispatching.
- If an alarm system is more than five years old, the equipment should be evaluated for upgrading or updating.
- Finally, after an alarm system has been activated, the occupant should wait a few moments to insure the alarm system activated itself proper.

### **Biological Alarm**

The earliest “alarm systems” used by man to detect intruders were his animals. An alarm, after all, is basically a device to discover the presence of an intruder and sound a warning — a dog may possibly be a good alternative for this purpose. A noisy, little dog can be a very inexpensive, very effective intrusion detection alarm. Food, water and affection

can produce an alert, mobile, self contained alarm system which may be as effective as an electronic home alarm.

### **Security Closet**

Each home should ideally have a security closet, for storage of firearms, silver, cameras, coin collections, etc., within it. This closet should have load bearing walls on as many sides as possible. Heavy plywood should be installed on the inside (plasterboard) walls. The security closet should have a solid core door, a heavy duty deadbolt, high security strike and non-removable hinge pins. If the home has an alarm system, the closet door or interior should be alarmed.

### **Home Safes**

If a homeowner utilizes a safe for securing money or valuables, the safe should have a Underwriters Laboratories (UL) burglary resistant label on it. This UL label means that the safe model has been tested to resist attacks of a specific nature for a certain number of minutes, Fire resistant chests and files also have UL ratings which indicate an endurance to fire in minutes or hours. Many people do not know the difference between fire resistant safes or chests and money safes.

### **Safe Deposit Boxes**

Homeowners should be strongly encouraged to rent a safe deposit box in which to store:

- 1) compact items of extreme value, such as diamonds or others expensive jewelry, heirlooms, and stamp and coin collections;
- 2) flammable documents such as legal papers, certificates, stocks and bonds, insurance policies, contracts and inventory and photos of household goods. Depending upon the special needs of the homeowner, the following is a list of the type of documents that should be stored in a rented band safe deposit box:

Stock and bond certificates	Income tax records
Mortgages, property titles and deeds	Health records
Birth, marriage and death certificates	Insurance policies
Passports Pension plans	Household inventory
Military discharge papers	Citizenship and adoption papers

### **If There is a Death in the Family**

Some burglars read obituaries and know people will be gone from the home during a funeral. If there is a death in the family, arrangements should be made for a house-sitter the day of the funeral.

### **Operation Identification**

The homeowner should participate in Operation Identification (see Chapter Twenty-Seven for more detailed information about Operation Identification), if it is offered by the local police or sheriff's department. If Operation Identification is not locally offered, they should purchase an engraver on their own. The homeowner should engrave their social security number (preceded by their state abbreviation) on items of value such as TV's, stereos, VCR's, cameras, sporting equipment, tools, etc. They should photograph unmarkable items such as china, silver or jewelry. The homeowner should make a complete inventory of household goods, including serial numbers of valuables. The inventory and a photo or videotape of the items should be secured in a rented band safe deposit box. If they are available, Operation

Identification stickers should be placed on the front door, front window or other clearly visible location *after* the items of value have been engraved.

### **Neighborhood Watch**

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program that uses citizens, in cooperation with law enforcement, to reduce crime in their communities. It involves neighbors getting to know each other, taking the time to watch out for each other, and working together in a program of mutual assistance. Neighborhood Watch is an effective means of reducing residential burglaries. By participating in Neighborhood Watch, the homeowner will learn:

- Effective crime prevention techniques for home safety and security.
- How to become law enforcement's "eyes and ears" and help them provide security to residential areas.
- How to report a crime: what to look for, how to describe an intruder, vehicle or activity and what additional information to give.