

# HOME SECURITY TIPS

Burglary is mostly a crime of opportunity that capitalizes on the carelessness and neglect of the homeowner or renter. This brief contains tips on preventing home burglaries, vandalism, and other property crimes by controlling access, providing visibility, and maintaining your property. It also contains tips on protecting your home when you are away, as well as protecting the property you take with you. And, if you do become a victim, it includes tips on helping The Police get to your home and to identify your property. These tips can significantly enhance the security of your home and property.

## Controlling Access

The following tips suggest how access to your home can be controlled by physical protection, deterrent measures, and good safety practices.

### *Physical Protection*

Make sure that all protective measures installed meet the fire and life safety standards for your type of building. This will assure safety and code compliance as well as enhance your security.

### Doors

- Make sure that all exterior single-swing wooden doors are of solid-core or paneled construction, with a minimum thickness of 1-3/4 inches.
- Install a wide-angle (180 degree) peephole. This device enables you to identify persons at the door without them seeing you.
- Hinges should be located on the inside or have non-removable pins.
- Adjust exterior sliding-glass patio-type doors so that they cannot be lifted up in their tracks to defeat their locks. One way to do this is to install a few sheet-metal screws in the top track with their heads nearly touching the top of the door when it is closed.

### Locks

Doorknob locks offer no security. Defeating these locks is one of the most common means of forced entry. Chains don't provide security either. They are only good for privacy. All exterior doors should have an additional deadbolt lock.

- Install single cylinder deadbolt locks on all exterior doors. Bolts should have a minimum throw of 1 inch. Strike plates should have screws that are at least 3 inches long.
- On all exterior double doors, install flush bolts installed at the top and bottom of the inactive door. These should be made of steel and have a minimum throw of 1 inch.
- Install locking devices on all exterior sliding-glass patio-type doors. These doors should have deadbolt locks as well as secondary locking devices, the simplest of which is a wooden stick that is placed in the lower track to prevent the door from opening. Better security can be obtained from thumbscrew-type locks that are mounted on both the top and bottom tracks.
- Install good locks all doors that lead outside through garages or storage areas.
- Re-key or change all locks when moving into a new home.
- Install good locks on gates, garages, sheds, etc. If padlocks are used, they should be keyed and able to survive assaults by bolt cutters or pry bars. The shackles should be made of hardened steel and thick. It is even better to use a "shielded" padlock that is designed to protect against bolt cutters. Combination locks should not be used because they offer very poor security.
- Use a multi-frequency opener on electrically-operated garage doors, and make sure that the bottom cannot be lifted up to allow a burglar to crawl under the door.
- Use hardened steel hinges, hasps, and padlocks on hand-lifted garage doors.
- Install cane bolts or sliding hasps on the inside of garage doors to provide additional security.
- Go to a locksmith or hardware store for advice on locks.

## Windows

- Secure double-hung sash windows by drilling a hole that angles downward through a top corner of the bottom window into the bottom corner of the top window on both sides of the window. Place an eyebolt or nail in the hole to prevent the window from being opened.
- Replace louver windows with solid glass or some other type of ventilating window. If this cannot be done, glue the panes together with a two-part epoxy resin.
- Secure casement windows with key-locking latches. Make sure that the protrusion on the window that the lock is attached to is made of steel and not worn, and that the window closes properly and is not bowed or warped.
- Secure sliding-glass windows as described above for sash windows or by the same types of locking devices used for sliding-glass doors.
- Consider installing security bars on side, rear, or other windows that a burglar might break to enter your home. Make sure that the retaining bolts cannot be removed from the outside. Bars must comply with Oakland Fire Code requirements for inside release to permit an occupant to escape in the event of a fire.
- Reinforce the glass in viewing windows on the lock sides of doors so a burglar cannot break them and reach in to open the door.

## Other Openings

Pet doors, crawl spaces, ventilation windows, and other openings should also be secured. And, make sure that window air conditioners are installed securely and cannot easily be removed from the outside.

## Fences, Walls, and Gates

- Enclose rear and side yards. Open chain-link or ornamental metal fencing are recommended unless there is a need for privacy or noise mitigation. Chain-link fencing should have its bottom edge secured with a tension wire or galvanized pipe, or should be seated in concrete to prevent easy lifting. Solid fences or walls are not recommended because they are easier to climb, provide hiding places for intruders, and are subject to graffiti. The permissible heights and locations of various types of fences and walls are specified in the City of Oakland Municipal Code. These should be examined prior to construction.
- Mount gate latches with carriage bolts and make sure that the nuts are welded on, or the bolt threads are stripped to prevent nut removal.

## Landscaping

- Trim trees so that limbs don't provide a means of getting on roofs or second stories, or of getting over a wall or fence.
- Plant bushes with thorns or prickly leaves under ground-level windows to make access more difficult for burglars.
- Plant bushes with thorns or prickly leaves along fences and walls to make climbing more difficult and prevent graffiti.

## Outdoor Storage

Metal sheds provide good additional storage space provided they are assembled correctly and have a good padlock.

## Good Security Practices

You and your home will not be safe unless you follow good security practices. These tips will help make your protective measures effective:

- Keep all doors and windows locked, even if you are just going out "for a minute." If a window is left open a few inches for ventilation, it should be locked to prevent someone from opening it more.
- Lock gates, garages, and sheds after each use.
- Store bicycles, mowers, etc. in a locked garage or shed, or secure them to some stationary point.
- Don't leave notes on your door when you are away from home.
- Don't leave keys in mailboxes or planters, under doormats, or in other obvious hiding spots. Leave an extra key with a neighbor.
- Learn to recognize who belongs in your neighborhood, development, or apartment, i.e., residents, workers, guests, etc.

- Know who's at your door before opening it. Check photo registration card before dealing with any solicitors, peddlers, interviewers, etc. These persons are required to obtain a permit from the City and display it on the front of their clothing.
- Be suspicious of persons making unsolicited offers of services.
- Post a **NO SOLICITING** sign if you don't want any solicitor to ring your door bell, knock on your door, or make any other sound to attract your attention.
- Ask for photo identification before letting in anyone you don't know. Check out the identification with the company or agency if you are suspicious.
- If you are having work done on your home by a contractor, ask the contractor to give you the names of all workers that will be performing work at your home.
- Never let a stranger enter your home to use the telephone. Offer to make the call yourself in an emergency.
- Don't give your name or whereabouts on your answering machine message. Never say you aren't home.
- Don't leave your home keys on a chain with your vehicle keys when you use valet parking. Also, don't leave your garage door opener where it is easily accessible. Keep your vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any other papers with your home address on them where a criminal is not likely to find them.
- Don't give maids, babysitters, valets, or others working in your home access to your home keys.
- Call the police at **911** (landline), or **777-3211** (cell phone), if you are at home and hear or see something suspicious. Don't take direct action yourself.
- Don't go in or call out if you return home and suspect someone has broken into your home, e.g., if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, or a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway. Go to a neighbor's home and call The Police.
- Don't discuss your finances or possessions with strangers.
- Keep valuable papers, jewelry, etc. in a bank safe deposit box. Don't store them at home unless you have a security closet or a safe that is well hidden and cannot be removed.

### *Deterrent Measures*

#### **Dogs**

In most cases dogs act as a psychological deterrent and can be an excellent supplement to a security system provided the animal can be relied upon to give warning when warning is needed. Dogs can scare a stranger away by either barking or looking fierce. But, remember that they can be lured away, poisoned, killed, or even stolen. Trained attack dogs are not recommended because the risk of liability to the owner is great should the dog attack an innocent person. Outside dogs should be kept in a fenced area with a good lock on the gate.

#### **Alarms**

There is no way an alarm system can make your home burglarproof. However, a good system can deter and/or detect most non-professional burglars and give you some peace of mind. Reputable companies will install and maintain a system that will ring an alarm on the premises and silently signal the company's headquarters for dispatching the police or an alarm company agent.

Once the company representative has made an appraisal of your security needs, ask for a written proposal and a copy of the contract you will have to sign. Make sure the contract lists all the points of protection, the equipment to be installed, and the initial and monthly payments. You should also check with your insurance company to see if you qualify for an alarm discount. Please keep in mind that you can be fined for multiple false alarms, so make sure the equipment you buy is of good quality.

#### **Signs and Borders**

- Post a Neighborhood Watch (Home Alert), or alarm company sticker on entry doors and windows.
- Use fencing, gates, landscaping, pavement treatment, signs, etc. to define clear boundaries between your property and adjoining properties.

## Providing Visibility

### *Lighting*

Illuminate your property at night. Don't depend on streetlights or lights from adjoining properties.

- Leave outside lights on after dark. Lights can be put on timers or on a device which causes them to go on at dusk and off at dawn.
- Make sure there are no shadows or dark areas around the house, garage, or yard in which a person could hide.
- Check lights regularly and replace burnt out bulbs.
- Protect your lights from vandals with wire covers.
- Be sure your lights don't shine into the eyes of passing motorists or police patrols.
- Padlock your circuit breaker box to prevent lights from being turned off.

Good four-corner exterior lighting is important, particularly where there are dark areas around the house. Floodlights installed under eaves can illuminate these areas and expose anyone next to the house. Timers or photoelectric cells can be used to turn lights on at dusk and off at dawn. And motion sensors can be used to turn lights on when any motion is detected. These devices can be purchased from most hardware stores.

### *Landscaping*

- Trim bushes to less than 3 feet to eliminate possible hiding places, especially near windows, sidewalks, and exterior doors.
- Trim tree canopies to at least 8 feet to allow visibility into your property.
- Make sure that trees and bushes do not block lights.

## Maintaining Your Property

It is important to keep your property in good condition. Criminals are attracted to property in poor condition because they see that the owners or tenants do not care about it.

- Keep property free of trash, litter, weeds, leaves, dismantled or inoperative vehicles, and other things that indicate neglect in caring for your property.
- Remove graffiti as soon as possible after it is found. This will discourage further vandalism. The graffiti should be covered with matching paint so a "canvas" is not left for the vandals. Hardware or paint stores should be consulted regarding the best products for removing various types of graffiti from specific surfaces without damaging the surface. Extreme care should be used in applying special graffiti removal products like MEK (Methyl Ethyl Ketone) or "Graffiti Remover" on glass or unpainted surfaces.
- Replace broken windows or screens.
- Repair broken fences and gate locks.
- Use screens, wired glass, or other protection for light fixtures and bulbs.
- Remove loose rocks and other objects that could be used to vandalize your property.

## Protecting Your Home And Property When You Are Away

Many of these actions are intended to make it appear that you are not away from home.

- use timers on lights, radios, TVs, etc. to make them go on and off during the day and night to make your home appear occupied.
- stop mail and newspaper delivery, or have neighbor pick up anything left at the home.
- keep grass watered and cut. water and trim other landscaping.
- ask the neighbors to watch your home and report any suspicious activities.
- leave your itinerary with a neighbor so you can be contacted in an emergency.
- disconnect your electric garage door opener and padlock the door, preferably on the inside.

At a hotel or motel when on a vacation or business:

- Use all available locks on the doors and windows.
- Unpack and place your belongings in the closet and dresser. Arrange things so you can easily tell if something is missing. Keep a list of all things you brought from home.
- Lock your suitcases so they cannot be used to carry things out. Consider hiding electric appliances and other valuable items in your suitcase.
- Don't leave cash, checks, credit cards, jewelry, vehicle keys, etc. in the room. Take them with you or lock them in the hotel or motel safe.
- Report any lost or stolen items to the hotel or motel management as well as to the police.

## **Helping The Police Get To Your Home**

- Make sure your street address number is clearly visible from the street and is well lighted at night so the police and other emergency personnel can locate your home easily. Numbers should be at least 6 inches high. Numbers on curbs or mailboxes should not be the sole means of residence identification. If numbers are painted on curbs, they should be located near driveways where they are not likely to be blocked by parked vehicles.
- Make sure your unit number (in a multifamily housing development) is clearly visible from paths in the development. A directory or map that shows paths and unit locations should be placed at the main entrance of the development.
- Provide The Police with an entry code if your community or development has a security gate.

## **Identifying Your Property**

- Etch your driver's license number on any valuables that might be stolen.
- Photograph valuables that cannot be etched.
- Keep a detailed, up-to-date record of your valuables. Include type, model, serial number, and fair market value.