

Most criminals are lazy animals. Knowing this makes it difficult for an intruder by making your home a "HARD TARGET". An intruder's selection process is very simple; he is usually looking for an unoccupied home with the easiest access, the greatest amount of cover to hide his actions, and the best escape route. When a burglar is browsing a neighborhood, deterrents and home owner management are critical factors in protecting a home. Proper target-hardening will usually persuade the opportunistic thief to choose another home that offers them easier access and fewer risks.

Once a home had been targeted, the burglar will actually spend only about 60 seconds gaining access and no more than about five minutes inside. In most home break and enters, the point of entry is on the ground floor and via a side or back door, with the garage being the second most common entry point. Without a doubt, the three most common characteristics of this crime are:

1. The break and enter usually happens during the daytime
2. Most targeted homes are two person working households
3. Most happen between the months of May and September

Here are some suggestions to target-harden your home:

- Install motion lights or leave your front and rear porch lights on at night. Ensure these lights are placed at a height that cannot be easily reached by an intruder. There have been a number of documented cases where criminals have unscrewed or covered up a home's motion and flood lights, thus allowing them to work under the cover of darkness
- Trim large bushes which cover or hide windows and doors. They also provide cover for an intruder to work behind. The exception to this strategy is to have defensive shrubbery such as large prickly or thorny bushes, a natural form of barbed wire
- Fences and hedges, although not impassible, act as a deterrent to burglars. Fences and hedges can, however, also conceal burglars. Therefore, a fence you can see through is best
- Do not store ladders or tools outside. Many burglars have used the homeowners own ladder to gain access into a second story window that was left open.
- Do not hide house keys anywhere outside the home. Leave them with a trusted neighbor. Thieves know all the usual places (under rocks, mats, or ledges) and are extremely clever at finding the unusual places
- If you are a woman living alone, do not use your first name on mailboxes or apartment directory boards. Use your last name only. Do not use "occupied" as this practice has become so common that it almost invariably indicates a single woman living there.
- Make sure that your street address is visible from the road. This will help emergency personnel find you. Also do not place your family name anywhere on the exterior of your home. It is a common strategy that when prowling a neighborhood, a thief will look for homes that advertise the occupant's name.

The thief can look that name up in the phone book and find the number that corresponds to the address. He will then walk up to the front door and with his cell phone dial the number. If there is no answer and he can hear the phone ringing, it is a good indicator that no one is home.

- Ensure that all doors are solid core and can withstand being kicked in. All doors should be fitted with good quality deadbolt locks with at least a 1.5 inch bolt throw into the door frame. Even better than, or in addition to, the deadbolt, is a new device called "The Door Block". This revolutionary new system, designed in Canada, is simple, easily installed, and inexpensive, and greatly increases your doors "kick-in" resistance
- Ensure that the door frame has a solid 5-10 inch metal striking plate. The strike plate, which holds the lock bolt from the lock in place, and which comes with most deadbolt locks, is often substandard and is what usually gives way first when a door is forced in by an intruder.
- Install a wraparound steel plate on the front of the door which covers the deadbolt and strike plate. This device will not only strengthen a door's "kick-in" factor, but will also make it extremely hard for an intruder to use a pry tool to pop or shimmy the door open
- Pin hinges on the outside of exterior doors should be secured with a long screw into the frame to prevent a burglar from simply unscrewing the hinges and removing the door
- If your doors are solid wood, install a peephole that gives you a broad view of who or what is on the other side
- Basement windows and any ground floor window that are hidden from view should be barred or secured with the new types of non-breakable window films now available
- Sliding doors and windows that can be lifted out of their frames should be fitted with anti-lift devices in the upper track. For patio doors, a "swingdown bar" or a "Charley Bar" is an excellent security device and acts as a visual deterrent
- Ensure that garage doors are closed and locked. If going away for an extended period of time, ensure that the garage door is padlocked from the inside. Remember, that once an intruder is inside an attached garage, he has all the time and concealment in the world to work in the inside door to your home
- Always keep doors and windows locked, even if you are at home, inside or outside. Often, but especially during the warmer months, thieves will sneak in a front door while you are out in the back yard gardening or doing other things (hence the nickname "green thumb burglars")
- Use a door wedge instead of a door chain. Chains can be easily broken or cut. A door wedge is often stronger than the door is it secures
- Join a neighbourhood or block watch program and get to know your neighbours. Among the best crime prevention tools available to a homeowner are nosy neighbours who will call the police if they see anything suspicious or unusual.

INSIDE YOUR HOME:

- Get a dog if able. Criminals avoid dogs because they make noise and can be aggressive, two things they do not like
- Take an inventory of the house, room by room, both written and with still photographs or videotape.
- Valuable jewellery and documents that are not in a safety deposit box should be hidden. The bedroom is not a safe place; it is the first room thieves check because they know most valuables are kept there. The kitchen, with many cupboards and shelves, is a good hiding area. There are a number of diversionary home safes on the market that look like cans of pop, beer, and other common household products
- Engrave your drivers licence number on valuables such as stereos, televisions, computers, and tools
- Because home computers are prime targets for thieves, back up your hard drive files regularly to ensure you are not out of business if your computer equipment is stolen
- Before leaving your home, develop the habit of doing a walk-through check of your residence to ensure that all doors and windows are locked

WHILE YOU ARE AWAY:

- A quiet house with long grass, permanently closed curtains, and a pile-up of mail, flyers, and newspapers immediately signals that nobody is at home, a perfect opportunity for a thief.
- Alert trusted neighbours that you are going away and for how long. Ask them to watch for suspicious strangers and to report these people to the police
- Arrange for someone to pick up the mail, newspapers, and flyers. In some areas you may be able to cancel delivery of these items altogether during your absence
- Ensure that you have a trusted person check your house every day or at least every 48 hours.
- Ensure that your insurance coverage is up-to-date, including replacement insurance.
- Leave a car in the driveway- if not yours, a friend's or neighbour's
- If you plan to be away for an extended period of time, have a reliable house-sitter live in the home