

Protect your home from theft



It's the homecoming nobody wants: dresser drawers dumped, cables yanked from the wall, belongings strewn in the wake of a burglar's "shopping spree." The FBI Crime Clock estimates that in 2010, a burglary occurred every 14.3 seconds somewhere in the United States.

While it's impossible to completely burglar-proof any home, you can reduce your risk by making your home less attractive to burglars, forming neighborhood block watches, and participating in other anti-crime activities.

Start with simple things

Most burglaries are committed by nonprofessionals who rely on easy entry to your home. To discourage them:

- Install deadbolt locks that have high-security strike plates (the metal plates attached to the door frame) and long screws, which compensate for soft wood in the door frame. Replace existing 3/4" screws with screws at least 2 1/2" long to penetrate studs. That alone will double or triple the strength of your door.
- Lock all windows when you're away from home, even if it's just for a few minutes. You can install crescent-sash latches that lock, or you can drill a hole through the frames and pin windows with a nail.
- Install pin-type locks on sliding glass doors and lay a broom handle or dowel in the door's runner as a backup.

- Replace weak doors. Hang solid-core doors that are at least 1 3/4" thick. A burglar can easily put his foot through a hollow or fragile door.
- Don't leave spare keys outside. Burglars know that doormats and planters are common hiding places.
- Trim shrubbery that could provide cover for a burglar or serve as a boost to upstairs windows.
- Turn on outdoor lights after dark. Floodlights positioned at each corner of the house can help discourage would-be intruders.
- Keep your name off the mailbox and door. Thieves can use your name to get your home phone number and call to see if anyone's there.
- Leave a message on your voice mail that says you can't come to the phone but will call back soon. Don't say, "We're not home right now."

A cat burglar will play while you're away

Vacations are an opportune time for burglars to strike, especially if you leave telltale signs that your home is empty. Whether you're gone for a day or a couple of weeks, take the following precautions:

- Warn children never to tell strangers about your vacation plans.
- Make sure the lawn is mowed.
- Discontinue mail and newspaper service or have a trusted neighbor collect mail and papers daily.
- Leave a car in the driveway or ask a neighbor to park there.

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- Connect several lights and even a radio to an automatic timer.
- Keep your drapes and blinds drawn.

Sound the alarm on a burglar

Having an alarm is one of the best ways to scare away a burglar. It also may entitle you to a discount on your PEMCO Homeowners, Rental Resident, or Condominium Unit-Owners Policy.

The best alarms feature reliable sensors that detect intruders before they enter through outside windows and doors. Opt for an audible system that sounds inside where the intruder can hear it and outside where neighbors can hear it.

Before you buy, get estimates and ask questions. Find out about:

- Company background. How long has it been in business? Is it licensed and bonded?
- Warranties and service. Do warranties include parts and labor? Is 24-hour response or repair service offered? Maintenance contracts? Central-station monitoring?

Fight back with Operation Identification

Operation Identification is a free program that discourages fencing of stolen property and assists in its recovery and return. The program also provides evidence that helps arrest and convict burglars.

To join Operation ID, go to your local police station. You'll be given information pamphlets, an inventory booklet, and window decals. The police also may lend you an engraver to mark your belongings.

- Record all your belongings (including serial and model numbers) and their value in the inventory booklet.
- Mark valuables with the engraver. Inscribe your WA or OR driver's license number. (Never use your Social Security number, which could put you at risk for identity theft.)
- Store your inventory booklet in a safe place – at work, with a trusted relative or neighbor, or in a safe deposit box.
- Post the Operation ID decals in prominent locations near entryways and windows.

Team up with a neighbor

Thwart burglars by organizing a block watch. All you need is an agreement among your neighbors and a list of their addresses and phone numbers in case someone spots suspicious activities. Most police departments sponsor block-watch programs and help neighborhoods organize. They also provide local crime statistics, speakers for block-watch meetings, and crime-prevention tips. Call your local precinct for more information.

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