

Home Security Checklist

A home security assessment is essential to identifying weaknesses in your physical security that might provide an easy opportunity for a crime to occur. This checklist is intended to assist you in identifying possible weaknesses in and around your home. While nothing can make your home absolutely “burglar-proof,” these recommendations are intended to create security layers that, if implemented, can serve to reduce criminal opportunity and make it more difficult to force entry into your home.

You should assess your home’s security from the standpoint of a burglar. What may or may not attract a burglar to your home? Is there a Neighborhood Watch on the street? Is there good visibility in and out that might allow neighbors and police patrols to see a burglar? Are doors and windows difficult to defeat? Is there an alarm system in place to hurry the burglar? Are belongings marked or inventoried that might result in recovery and/or an arrest after the fact? What can I do to make my home too risky for burglars?

Use this checklist to check your home for any security weaknesses. Then, make the necessary changes to “harden the target.”

Your home’s perimeter---too risky, or too easy?

- Are your house numbers readily visible from the street and rear alley (if applicable), properly painted on the curb, or applied to a curbside mailbox to help emergency responders locate your home?
- Shrubs and trees should be pruned away from sidewalks, driveways, porches, doors, windows, and gates to eliminate hiding places.
- Bushes under windows should be pruned below the sills.
- Tall bushes should be pruned from the ground up to expose feet and legs.
- Tree limbs and branches should be pruned upward at least six feet to open a clear field of view both onto and out from the property.
- Lighting should be directed to cover the front, rear, and sides of the house, such as motion-sensored twin spots, that are vandal-resistant and mounted under the roof eaves.
- The best fence is one you can see through. Privacy fences provide privacy for residents AND burglars. Gapping wooden slats enhances visibility. Place horizontal rails on the inside, not the outside (creating a ladder). Lock fence gates when feasible.

Attached / detached garages and storage sheds---

- All personnel doors should be solid core or metal cased, with deadbolt locks, reinforced strike plates, and guard plates to hinder prying.
- Overhead rolling doors should have a secondary locking system to compliment the electric opener. The emergency release feature can be tripped from the outside by breaking a window to pull the release cord, or by catching the hook with a device pushed through the top of the door. Take appropriate action.
- All purpose shed doors should be secured with a high security padlock with a protected shackle or a disc lock to hinder bolt cutters. The receiving hasp should be secured with bolts through washers or a steel plate on the interior to hinder prying.
- Any windows should be secured by a secondary lock on or in the window track.
- Doors and windows should be illuminated at night.
- Contents, such as lawn equipment and bicycles, should be marked or inventoried by serial number and photographed.

Your home's exterior barriers---

Doors---

- All exterior doors should be of a solid material, such as wood, metal cased, or fiberglass.
- All exterior doors should be secured by a deadbolt lock with a tapered or free-spinning collar, and a minimal bolt extension of 1". Locks can be installed on the door lower or higher than typical to reduce leverage, and more than one lock can be used.
- Breakable glass in the door or within 40" (arm's reach) is a concern which can be mitigated by the application of glass security laminates, acrylics, or break resistant glass.
- The strike plate on the door frame receiving the deadbolt should either be reinforced with 2.5" to 4" case hardened steel wood screws, or further enhanced with a high security strike plate kit (recommended).
- Patio or French double doors should also utilize a good deadbolt into a stationary door that is secured by header and threshold bolts into metal strikes. Because these doors are typically weak due to all the glass, a secondary barrier system is recommended, such as a charley bar or a t-bar door guard.

Sliding glass doors need extra security against prying and lifting. A charley bar or an old broom handle can prevent opening. Three screws into the top track, backed out to just clear the top of the door, will prevent lifting.

All door hinges should be on the inside. If not, an extra step must be taken to secure outside hinges.

Windows---

The security of any operational window can be enhanced with a secondary lock or barrier to compliment the manufacturer's latching system.

Wooden windows can be pinned using a drill and ten-penny nail.

Aluminum framed windows can be better secured by installing removable track locks.

Newer vinyl replacement windows may have security "wings" or pop-out latches that stop the window from being raised.

A simple wooden dowel, cut to fit snugly in the track, will suffice as a locking device.

Double-paned windows, storm windows, and glass security laminates are considered secondary locking devices.

Thorny bushes or prickly shrubs are ideal plantings below window sills.

Your home's interior---

Security Systems---

A burglary alarm will not prevent a burglary. It will only hurry the offender. So, don't skimp on hardware thinking that just an alarm system is sufficient to protect your home. An alarm system is only an additional security layer. Consider installing one if the home is empty most of the day, or if you own collectibles, firearms, and other valuables.

Safes---

A safe must be selected based upon its intended function. A document safe is intended to protect against fire. A security safe is designed to protect valuables. Safes come with various U.L. ratings and capabilities. If you are not willing to purchase a high security safe, place your valuables in a bank's safe deposit box. If you do utilize a security safe, it is best to secure it to the foundation of your home so that it cannot be carried away. The addition of a home alarm system will seriously shorten the time needed for a burglar to attack the safe inside the home.

Property Inventory---

Record all serial numbers of electronics such as flat screens, laptops, desktops, audio components, firearms, cellular devices, lawn equipment, bicycles and any other valuables with identifying numbers. Take digital photographs of valuables, especially jewelry and collectibles without serial numbers. Residents can register their property inventories on a secure, off-site server offered through the Insurance Information Institute at www.knowyourstuff.org . Your inventory list can be retrieved by you at any time in the event of a loss due to theft, fire, flood or other event.

Recorded serial numbers also aid law enforcement in the recovery of stolen property and the arrest of offenders. An item's unique serial number is the only way to positively identify a specific piece of property, link it back to a reported offense, and return the item to its rightful owner.