

Home Security

By Chief Brian Miller, Hammond Police Department

Our homes are often our most cherished possession. With crime a major concern to each one of us, it is natural to want to protect our investment. When researching ways to make our homes more resistant to criminals, there are several things we should keep in mind. It would be an easy solution just to change our homes into prisons, by installing alarms, floodlights, burglar bars and electric shutters. Why stop there ? How about a moat around our property?

Quickly we begin to realize that we want to live in a safe comfortable home, not a castle or prison. Let's simplify our quest for home security by remembering the two things criminals hate the most. Light and noise. Lighting your home is an inexpensive and easy way to increase your security. Start by examining your home and trimming or removing shrubbery or trees that hide and conceal crooks, and block your attempts at illuminating your home. Put a security light in your front and back yards. Our City has a light program that will reimburse you for the cost of installing this item. I have also seen some very successful modifications made by residents that have put flood lights in the ground that light up their entire house. It not only adds to the exterior beauty of their home, it also provides a burglar proof environment. Don't forget to leave a light on when you leave your residence. A dark home, with no activity, is a welcome invitation for a criminal.

Install a small safe in your home. They cost little, and provide a major problem to a burglar that wants to be in and out of your house as soon as possible. By storing your high value items in a safe, you greatly enhance your security from theft and fire.

Let's move to our doors and windows. I have never seen a burglar enter a skylight. 99% of our burglars use doors or windows to enter the home. Lock your doors and windows ! Many of the burglaries I have investigated have occurred at house where there was a door or window left open. Simply by engaging your locks you can greatly improve security, make sure your doors have quality deadbolt locks. Products manufactured by Schlage are my personal favorite. As a SWAT officer, I participated in many forced entries into homes. Schlage locks always gave us fits. If you install locks, make sure your door and frame are solid. The lock will only provide as much resistance as the frame. Don't bother putting a nice lock on a cheap door. With good locks a burglar will have to use a window to gain entry. Breaking glass cause a lot of noise. Remember, burglars hate noise.

I am often asked if house alarms are effective. I always answer with a resounding "YES". The signs that you put in your back and front yard announcing the presence of an alarm are a major deterrent. Most criminals will just move on and find a residence that doesn't have an alarm. Home security systems are cheap investments protecting expensive valuables. Finally, my own residence has an alarm, so you know I must value their worth. Some residents may not be able to afford a home security system. Jars of pennies or vases with pebbles placed on your window sills are cheap alternatives. There are also wireless alarm systems available that provide sensors for doors and windows and an audible alarm that activates when a break in occurs. These are not monitored by an alarm company, so you can avoid the monthly fee.

I am often asked by residents about purchasing dogs and guns to help augment personal security. Dogs are a great idea. You don't have to buy an aggressive police dog or pit bull to guard your home. A small ankle biter is just fine. They hear things we can't and are alert 24 hours a day. A barking dog is a huge deterrent to criminals. If you don't want a dog, buy a huge dog bowl and chain for the back door area. Put a little dog food in it and pen a good name like "Killer" or "Rocky" on the side of the dish. Cheap insurance that really works.

Guns for home security are not always a good idea. If you have children in the house you must lock the weapons up and keep them safe from children. It's the law. If it's locked up, it will not be available during a crisis. Most gun owners don't practice enough to be proficient with their weapons. If you don't shoot a free throw all year, will you be able to hit one in the big game? Marksmanship training is important, but it is just as important to know when to shoot as it is to know how to shoot. If you are considering this option, talk with a competent firearms instructor (police or civilian) and get some good advice.

Train your family on how to react to a burglary in progress or other similar crisis. Everyone should know when and how to dial 911 and insure there are phones spread around the house. If you come home to a break in, **leave immediately!** Do not call 911 from your house, call from a neighbor's house. Confronting a burglar is extremely dangerous.

Hopefully these tips will help put your mind at ease. Investments in home security can be inexpensive and highly effective. The peace of mind they provide will be priceless.

I have been a law enforcement officer for eighteen years and have served as a burglary, sex crimes and violent crimes investigator. I have a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Criminal Justice and have taken course work for my Doctorate. Please feel free to copy this pamphlet and pass it out as you desire.

