

Seattle Police Crime Prevention Bulletin



Deterring Burglary From Outside the Home

In other bulletins, we've address door and window security and provide tips for inhibiting entry by a burglar. For this bulletin, we focus on the exterior of your home. We want to deter the burglar from even wanting to try and get in to your home in the first place.

Outside Your Home

Home security starts where the burglar starts – OUTSIDE. Most burglars are adept at “judging a book by its cover,” seeking external weak spots which more often than not mirror the integrity of the home’s overall security. Begin by looking at your home “through the eyes of a burglar.” Can someone gain access to your home without being seen? Do they have cover and concealment to enter through a door or window without neighbors noticing?

Shrubbery

Shrubbery that conceals entries or windows should be trimmed to increase visibility around your home and eliminate hiding places. The thought here is to open up lines of sight so that not only can you see out, but that your neighbors have good visibility of your home and can see if someone is trying to gain access.

- Trim shrubs and trees so they do not provide hiding places for an intruder. Use the 3/6 rule; Shrubbery/ground cover should be trimmed to no higher than 3 feet from the ground and trees should be “limbed up” so that the lowest branches are no lower than 6 feet off the ground. This provides for good lines of sight and visibility, and eliminates hiding places.
- Remove tree limbs that could allow someone to climb to an upper-story window or balcony.
- Planting thorny shrubs (such as holly, thistle, Oregon Grape), rosebushes or cacti around the outside of your home can discourage burglars from entering your property.



Lighting



The purpose of good lighting is to allow you to see a threat or suspicious person lurking in your path. If you can see a potential threat in advance then you at least have the choice and chance to avoid it. Good lighting also illuminates areas outside your home so that suspicious persons near your home can be seen. Good lighting is definitely a deterrent to criminals because they don't want to be seen or identified.

Exterior Lighting

Exterior lighting becomes critical if you must park in a common area parking lot or underground garage and need to walk to your front door.

- Exterior lighting needs to be bright enough for you to see 100 feet and it helps if you can identify colors.
- The perimeter of your home or apartment should be well lit, especially at the entryway.
- Exterior lighting on the front of a property should be on from dusk until dawn.
- Common area lighting on apartment properties should also either be on a timer or photocell to turn on at dusk and turn off at dawn.
- For the rear areas of the home or side yard, consider motion sensor lights that will activate when someone enters the area. A motion sensor light is also recommended for providing illumination of the area where you park your car. Suddenly being illuminated may deter a car prowler or auto thief.
- Garage or porch lights left on all day on a single family home are a dead giveaway that you are out of town. Have these lights on times, a combination of times, photocells and motion sensors, or have a trusted friend or neighbor turn your lights on and off for you while you are away.

Interior Lighting

Interior lighting is necessary to show signs of life and activity inside a residence. A darkened home night after night sends the message that you are away. Light timers are inexpensive and can be found everywhere. They should be used on a daily basis, not just when you're away. In this way you set up a routine that your neighbors can observe and will allow them to become suspicious when your normally lighted home becomes dark.

- Typically, you want to use light-timers near the front and back windows. The pattern of them clicking on and off simulates actual occupancy. The same timers can be used to turn on radios or television sets to further enhance the illusion of occupancy. Just remember to set the timers to come on at different time intervals and not all at the same time.

Tools and Ladders



Keep all tools and ladders securely locked and out of plain view. Burglars may use these to break in to your or someone else's home.

- Keep ladders, garbage cans, building supplies and tools locked up out of view so you don't provide an intruder with a platform and the means to break into your home.

Fencing

- A solid privacy fence can provide a burglar with cover to break into your home. Consider an iron railing (topped with spikes, to discourage climbers), or chain-link fence instead. If you have an opening gate, use a padlock, combo or cipher lock on it to prevent intruders from easily penetrating the perimeter of your property.



Alarm Signs, Block Watch Signs and Operation ID stickers



Placing alarm-company signs in your yard, Neighborhood Watch signs in the neighborhood, or alarm and Block Watch/Operation ID decals or dog notices on your property tell burglars to steer clear of your home and neighborhood. However, having these signs as a deterrent is only good if you can back them up. Don't rely on them to do the job for you. You still need to be vigilant, watch out for each other, report suspicious activity and make your home security improvements. Signs and decals do not a Block Watch make; you have to do the work.



Spare Keys

- Don't hide a spare key near your front door; burglars know all the hiding places. Leave a spare key with a trusted neighbor instead.
- Do not leave spare keys in the glove box of your car. Thieves have prowled cars in front of homes, or in driveways and carports of homes, and have found the house keys. They are able to determine with pretty high accuracy that they house keys found in the car most likely go to the home at which the car is parked.
- Secure any spare keys in your home out of sight. Keys left hanging on a bulletin board or hook gives thieves easy access to your home or vehicle for later. Also consider the cost of re-coring all your car and door locks if keys are taken.

Being Away From Home For Extended Periods

- Let your trusted neighbors know that you plan to be out town so that they can watch your home for you. If they see suspicious activity while you are gone, they will know to call 911 for you. Also let neighbors know if someone will be house-sitting for you so they don't call 911 inadvertently.
- Don't let mail and newspapers pile up. Have the Post Office hold your mail until you return. Consider having a neighbor bring in your newspaper rather than having the paper stopped; the fewer people who know your home is not occupied the better (except when it comes to your trusted neighbors).
- Refer to the Interior Lighting section above for suggestions on making your home appeared occupied.

House Numbers

- Be sure your house number is visible from the street, particularly at night. Reflective numbers outside on the front of your home will assist emergency responders (fire/medical/police) in quickly locating your home and will assist neighbors (in the event of an emergency or reporting suspicious activity) in directing responders to your aid.