

Home Security

"RE-SECURING YOUR HOME"

Courtesy Edmonton Police Service

Many of the techniques for securing your home that are outlined on this page are inexpensive and some of them outline " *do-it-yourself*" methods. The following information should result in a home that will **deter most criminals** .

LOCKS AND DOORS

Locks are the "*first line of defense*" against intruders. No lock can make a house burglar proof but can make a difference between the burglar considering your home easy or difficult to enter and the more difficult - the less likely a suspect is to try or succeed.

There are a variety of different kinds of locks. Some offer very minimal security and can be easily broken into.

There are some locks that make it very difficult for a burglar to get by.

Deadbolts

Deadbolts have to be opened with a key or a thumb turn and offer good to excellent protection, depending on the quality.

There are a few things which you should check when selecting a deadbolt lock.

- The bolt should be 1" or more in length when fully extended and should still have a bit within the mechanism of the lock. This ensures some degree of strength where the bolt and the mechanism meet.
- The outside collar surrounding the cylinder should be of a substantial construction (i.e. not a thin alloy which can be easily crushed or ripped open). "Slip rings" are a feature of some slightly more expensive models and allow the collar to rotate freely. This prevents the cylinder from being twisted off with vice grips or a pipe wrench.
- It is important that a suitable strike plate be attached to the frame to ensure a strong anchor point for the bolt to sit in.
- This type of lock is available with a double cylinder (key required to lock it from the inside as well as the outside). This is a useful feature where the inside thumb turn can be reached through a broken or forced window.

Strikers

A metal strike is installed on or in the door frame and is intended to house and protect the bolt of the lock. Most standard strike plates are small and are installed with short screws. An extended strike plate should be added to the frame to complement a good dead bolt. These extended strike plates are available from locksmiths in 8" or 12" sizes and, when attached with 2½" to 3" screws, they add a substantial degree of strength to the frame.

Wrap Around Strike Plate

These wrap around strike plates are another means of strengthening a frame where an extended strike plate cannot be used. This style of strike plate is fastened with screws in two directions, thereby enabling it to be fastened securely.

Exterior Doors

Exterior doors should be of solid core. Hollow doors are easy to punch or cut a hole through and reach the lock inside. Replace the hollow core door with a solid core door, as the hollow core door is not suitable for exterior use in any case. Exterior doors with glass or thin panels are easy for a burglar to break and reach the lock inside. Inspect the glass in or near your door. You may want to consider replacing it with a more secure glass or plastic or a shatter resistant plastic film adhered to the inside surface.

French or Double Doors

Most French doors have glass panes. Your first concern is to brace one of the doors, to reduce the inward "give" of the doors, leaving only one door active.

- If the French doors have glass (most do), install long, inset, keyed slide bolts at the top and bottom of the door you are deactivating.
- On the active door, install a jimmy-resistant vertical deadbolt with a double cylinder if the doors have glass. This device not only locks the active door, but also bolts the two doors snugly together.

Storm Doors

In warm weather people like to leave their doors open, relying upon the locked storm door to secure the house. Slitting the screen will allow a thief quick and quiet access to the inside lock and entry to the home.

Install a "hook and eye" on the upper part of the storm door. This will hold the door closed even if the would-be thief tampers with the door lock.

Door Frames

The best doors and locks can be broken by a burglar if he uses a wedge or crow bar between the frame and the door (the wedge forces the bolt out of the frame, so the door can be opened). This method is usually successful because doors and frames are purchased as single units and placed into the wall opening by only a few screws, which permit the frame to bow under pressure. Solid blocks inserted between these openings (usually in the middle of the frame) will help to resist this form of attack.

To strengthen the frame itself, install large (i.e. 3-4") screws through the doorstop strip and the frame and through the frame on the hinge side, into the wall. The screws pull the door frame and door stop strip tightly against the 2X4's in the main wall. When using larger screws, first drill a pilot hole to prevent splitting the frame.

Hinges

Check to see if the screws holding the hinge are large ones. If possible, use screws long enough to reach the wall stud beyond the frame. Again, when using larger screws, first drill a pilot hole to prevent splitting the frame.

Exposed Hinges

Most exterior doors in homes open inward, with the hinges on the inside. If your door opens outward, you must make sure that your exposed hinges are secure.

1. If your hinges are the kind from which pins cannot be removed, your exposed hinges are secure. If however, the exposed hinge pins can be removed (i.e. the pin

- has a top on it that can be knocked out with a hammer and/or a screwdriver), then you should consider changing the hinges to the non-removable type.
2. Another inexpensive method of preventing the removal of the hinge pins, is to drill a small hole into the middle part of the hinge and insert a small steel pin or screw. This will hold the pin into the hinge.

SLIDING DOORS AND WINDOWS

Exterior sliding doors and windows have a number of security problems in common - they usually have flimsy locks which are easily pried or even jiggled open.

1. If the door or window slides on an inside track, you may use a metal rod, a cut down hockey stick or a length of wooden dowel to fit snugly along the bottom track to prevent the door from being forced open.
2. A "Charlie Bar" is a more permanent and visible means of preventing lateral movement and some models are designed to fit an outside sliding door panel.
3. A door or window which slides on an outside track may also be secured by installing a keyed locking device.
4. Some doors and windows can be secured with a pin. Inspect your door or window in the fully closed position. If the frame permits drilling, drill a hole through the inner frame and halfway through the outer one. Slide into place a pin or sturdy nail that fits the hole snugly to prevent the door or window from being forced back. Be careful when drilling through the frame that you don't damage the thermal seal or glass.

Sashless Windows

These windows consist of two overlapping sheets of glass which slide in a track top and bottom. There are two sets of winders, an inner set and an outer set and are vulnerable to forced entry by either sliding the window open or lifting the panes of glass out of the track.

These ideas for securing them will cost you very little and can be done quite easily.

- Install screws in the upper track above the outer set of windows to prevent lifting.
- Install a permanent stick in the lower track behind the screen. This will prevent the outer pane from being slid open.
- Place a stick on the lower track of the outer set. A snug fit is essential to prevent the stick from being pried out of the track with a knife or wire slipped between the panes.
- Place a stick in the lower track of the inner set of windows as well.

- Install an additional rocker catch so that it sits against the edge of the inner pane of glass. Another stick may be used instead of this catch.

Double Hung Windows

These usually have a top half that can be lowered and a bottom half that can be raised. These windows are always vulnerable because they have thin glass a burglar can easily break and then reach in to open the latch. Don't rely on these windows to be secure just because they are painted shut.

1. If the window is not to be used as a fire exit, you may secure it by nailing it or screwing it permanently closed.
2. If the window must be opened or is needed for a fire exit, drill a downward-angled hole for a pin or heavy nail which can be removed. A second hole 2" or 3" above the first will let the window open for ventilation while remaining secure.
3. A keyed latch may be installed in place of a non-keyed one.
4. A wooden block screwed to the frame will secure the window if you do not need it as a fire exit.
5. Grillwork or bars may be installed if (as above) the window is not to be used in case of fire.

Casement Windows

These windows open by hinges mounted at the top, side, or bottom. Like double-hung windows, these have thin glass. In addition, many can be pried open by breaking a flimsy latch.

1. Replace the existing latches with a keyed latch or keyed slide bolt.
2. If you have a latch similar to the one shown, drill a hole through the latch handle and frame while the window is closed and insert a metal pin.
3. If you have a pivoting casement latch, place the latch in a closed position and put in its path a protruding screw so that the latch cannot pass the screw. Do this only if the window is not to be used as a fire exit.
4. If the window is used only to admit light and is never to be opened, install long screws from the sash into the frame or use grillwork bars.

Basement Grillwork, Guards and Bars

Basement windows are particularly vulnerable to entry by a child or young person. Improving only the window catch is usually not sufficient as the hinges are fastened with short screws, the frame is often not anchored into the foundation wall and the glass is single pane and easily broken.

Metal window bars or grills fastened securely to the exterior of the foundation wall or between the storm screen and window or to the interior basement wall are the only truly effective means of giving basement windows proper security.

There are many styles of window bars and different methods of installation - some with non-removable screws - some with pins and others with a padlock. Make sure at least one such device is installed in such a way that it can only be removed from the inside as a fire exit. All other windows can have the devices installed permanently, providing there is no danger of being trapped during a fire.

WINDOW GLASS AND PLASTICS

Untreated Glass

Standard window glass may either be sheet or plate glass.

Sheet glass is very thin (3/16" - not thicker). Almost all older and many newer homes are glazed with sheet glass. It has a very low security rating because it can be cut or broken with ease. Plate glass 3/16" or thicker is used in "picture" windows and is harder to break and cut. Plate glass is a little more secure than sheet.

Treated Glass

This glass is used in automobile windows. Many people don't realize that this is also available for use in the home.

Safety laminated glass has an inner layer of tough plastic. This laminate holds the glass together on impact, preventing injury from flying glass. Because it can be broken or cut only with considerable difficulty, this glass has a good security rating.

Tempered glass used in car windows breaks into small fragments which have no sharp edges. This glass has a good security rating because it cannot be cut and can be broken only with difficulty creating a noise.

Shatter resistant window film of a new transparent polyester film is now available to make windows stronger and more impenetrable. It is no more than .007 inch

thick, yet when applied to the inside of any window, will hold the glass firmly together if broken. This is particularly useful in sidelights and entrance doors with glass panels or windows where there is access to inside doorknobs or catches. This film is quite inexpensive and easy to apply.

Plastics

Three kinds of plastics - styrene, polycarbonate, and acrylic - are used in door windows. Styrene plastic is available in both interior and exterior grades, it is important to select the correct grade for the purpose intended. Acrylic is a much better choice for windows and doors, due to its combination of properties including weatherability, toughness impact resistance, and expense. It is available in many thicknesses and sheet sizes in products called PLEXIGLAS, LUCITE, and ACRYLIC.

INTERLOCKING BOLT RIM LOCKS

If you wish to lock a door from the inside and do not have to enter with a key (such as a back door), these type of locks should be considered as they offer excellent security.

- The outside cylinder should be equipped with a cylinder guard to resist prying.
- Lengthy screws should be used.
- The inside thumb turn should have a button to lock it and prevent its turning.

SECURITY HINTS

Light Timers

While you may think leaving a light on at all times while away is a good idea, it will attract attention to the home during the night because all other homes in the area are in darkness. Light timers, set in various rooms with each set to come on and off at different times, will give your home the appearance of being occupied. Light timers are quite inexpensive and can be purchased at most hardware and department stores.

Chain Locks

Door chains let you speak to a visitor without completely unfastening the door, but most door chains can be forced by even a slightly built intruder. Even those with locks are easily overcome with simple tools or brute force. For this reason, many police departments do not recommend their use. You should not rely on a door chain for security. A floor-mounted, retractable door stop is more effective.

Through-Door Viewers

In order to avoid opening your door without knowing who is there, a viewing device is recommended.

The best solution is to install a through-door viewer - a miniature telescope with a wide angle lens to let you see someone standing to one side of the door. These are relatively inexpensive and will adjust to varying door thicknesses.

Door Wedge

A rubber wedge is available commercially and when the two steel pins are inserted into the floor plate, the door may be opened only a few inches. They let you see and talk to the person, but ensure that the door cannot be opened to let the person in. The pins prevent the wedge from slipping if force is applied to the door from the outside. This item is quite inexpensive and particularly useful where children or women are alone. When not in use, it stores in a convenient holder.

Slide Bolts

Bolts are a device with a bar which slides into a socket for its locking action. Mortised or surface mounted bolts have many uses, such as bracing a French door top and bottom, securing the top to the bottom half of a Dutch door and securing sliding doors and windows.

- If you use a bolt for security, make sure it is a sturdy one mounted with long screws.

- The best solution, particularly on windows and doors that have untreated glass in or near them or have thin wood panels, is a keyed slide bolt mounted with one-way screws.

One-Way Screws

Screws are made that can be screwed in tight but cannot be removed with a screwdriver. However, these are seldom available at retail stores. A one-way screw is necessary whenever a locking device can be reached through a broken door pane or panel or window. If one-way screws are not used, a burglar might reach in with a screwdriver and dismantle the locking device.

- To make your own one-way screws, use Phillips (cross-head) or Robertson screws and set them tight. Then, with a drill bit, drill out the area where the screwdriver fits. Now the screw cannot be removed. Remember to use long screws.
- An easier solution is to use a "liquid metal" preparation to fill in the Phillips or Robertson driving recess for the slotted head. When this material dries, it is as strong as the screw metal and can be sanded and polished.

Householder's Identification

Do not put your name on the gate or the exterior of your home. This gives the opportunity to the burglar to look in the phone book for your number and call to see if you are home.

House numbers should be large, visible and lighted at night to help emergency personnel locate your home quickly. The same type of number, mounted at the back of the house, would help those approaching the house from a back lane or from the street to the rear. Numbers are at least 6" in height that are a colour contrast to their background should be adequate. Check from the road to see if you can read them clearly.

Single women living in an apartment should have their last name and initial only on the mail slots and by the buzzer. This should also apply to the telephone book.

Mail Boxes

Often we put up an undersized mailbox which, when full, is an indication that the house is vacant and may be for several days.

Consider replacing your mailbox with a larger one, that will keep your mail out of sight of would-be burglars. Only by opening the hinged lid can the contents, if any, be seen. Asking neighbours to take in your mail when you are away is the best solution.

Ladders

Step or extension ladders should not be left outside the house unless secured to an anchor point with a chain and padlock.

Ladders left insecure in an open garage will afford easy access to a burglar. If a ladder must be left outside, secure it and perhaps use it as a convenient bicycle rack to which the families bicycles may be secured.

Garages

Usually, locks that come installed on garage doors are easily destroyed or jimmied. A sturdy padlock will provide adequate security. For garages with overhead doors which tilt or roll up, install padlocks or bolts in the center of the tracks 1/4" above a roller with the door closed. This should be done on both tracks and will prevent rollers from moving, even if the outer lock is shimmed or destroyed.

Padlocks should be of heavy-duty construction with a hardened shackle and a heavy steel or laminated casing. (Take note of the identifying number on the padlock, stamped on the bottom of the casing - file off that number so no one can use the number to get duplicate keys.

Keep a Complete Inventory

Most people who lose valuables through crimes, fire or for any other reason find it surprisingly difficult to recall all of their belongings. Details such as brand names, models and descriptions are even more difficult to remember.

A properly completed inventory record of your valuables will prove invaluable in reporting any losses to the police. It also will be invaluable in preparing an insurance claim in the event you suffer a loss for any other reason.