

Home Security

Burglary is mostly a crime of opportunity that capitalizes on the carelessness and neglect of the homeowner or renter. This section contains tips on preventing home burglaries, vandalism, and other property crimes by controlling access, providing visibility, and maintaining your property. It also contains tips on protecting your home and property when you are away and providing information you might have on residential burglaries. And if you do become a victim, it includes tips on making sure the police find your home and to identify your property. These tips can significantly enhance the security of your home and property.

Controlling Access

The following tips suggest how access to your home, apartment, or condo can be controlled by physical protection, deterrent measures, burglar alarms, and various security procedures.

Physical protection measures include the following:

- Install single cylinder dead-bolt locks on all doors. Bolts should have a minimum throw of 1 inch. Strike plates should have screws that are at least 3 inches long. Doors should be solid hardwood or metal clad. Hinges should be located on the inside or have non-removable pins. Special locks are needed on double and Dutch doors.
- Install locking devices on all sliding glass doors and windows.
- Install good locks all doors that lead outside through garages or storage areas.
- Don't rely on chain locks for security. They're only good for privacy.
- Re-key or change all locks when moving into a new home.
- Install locks on gates, garages, sheds, etc.
- Go to a locksmith or hardware store for advice on locks.
- All locks should be resistant to "bumping"
- Reinforce the glass in windows on the lock sides of doors so a burglar cannot break them and reach in to open the door.
- Consider installing security bars on side, rear, or other windows that a burglar might break to enter your home. Bars must comply with Fire Code requirements for inside release to permit an occupant to escape in the event of a fire.
- Fence in the yard.
- Install a good side-yard gate and keep it locked at all times. Side and back entries are the most common access points for burglars.
- Plant bushes with thorns or prickly leaves near windows and along fences.
- Trim trees so that limbs don't provide access to roofs, second stories, etc.
- Call the SDPD CRO in your area to arrange for a free home security survey. SDPD division addresses and phone numbers are listed under IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD on this website.

Deterrent measures include the following:

- Put Neighborhood Watch, alarm company, and Operation ID stickers on entry doors and windows.
- Consider having a dog that can scare a stranger away by either barking or looking fierce. Keep an outside dog in a fenced area and have a good lock on the gate.

- Use fencing, gates, landscaping, pavement treatment, signs, etc. to define clear boundaries between your property and adjoining properties.

Consider installing a home alarm system that provides monitoring for burglary.

- Alarm systems usually include one or more of the following components: photocell or magnetic contacts on doors and windows, heat or motion detectors in interior spaces, glass break detectors, keypads with a means of checking the status of the system, and audible alarms. All equipment should be Underwriters Laboratory (UL) certified.
- Multiple sensors are preferred because they reduce false alarms, which are wasteful of police resources and lead to fines and permit revocation.
- See Secs. 33.3701-33.3723 of the San Diego Municipal Code for burglary alarm business and agent requirements and responsibilities, alarm user permit requirements, etc. Call SDPD Permits and Licensing at **(619) 531-2250** about obtaining an alarm permit.
- Get alarm company references from friends or neighbors. Get at least three estimates in writing. The SDPD does not prefer or recommend companies, brands, or types of security systems.
- Make sure the alarm company has a City Business Tax Certificate and is licensed by the State of California. You can verify the latter by calling the State of California Bureau of Security and Investigative Services at **(916) 322-4000** or going online at <http://www.dca.ca.gov/bsis>.
- If your system is monitored, make sure the monitoring station is open 24/7 and has backup power. The company's customer service department should also be open 24/7.
- Make sure you understand your service contract, all the points of protection and the equipment to be installed, the initial and monthly payments, and the warranty period.
- Inform your insurance company. You may qualify for a discount.
- The system should also have a fail-safe battery backup. Check the batteries periodically and replace them if necessary.

Security procedures include the following:

- Keep all doors and windows locked, even if you are just going out "for a minute." If a window is left open a few inches for ventilation, pins or dowels should be inserted in the tracks to prevent someone from opening it more.
- Lock gates, garages, and sheds after each use.
- Store bicycles, mowers, ladders, etc. in a locked garage or shed, or secure them to some stationary point.
- Don't leave notes on your door when you are away from home.
- Don't leave keys in mailboxes or planters, under doormats, or in other obvious hiding spots. Leave an extra key with a neighbor.
- Learn to recognize who belongs in your neighborhood, development, or apartment, i.e., residents, workers, guests, etc.
- Know who's at your door before opening it. Check photo registration card before dealing with any solicitors, peddlers, interviewers, etc. These persons are required to obtain a card from the SDPD and display it on the front of their clothing. They are allowed to solicit only between 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. except by appointment.
- Be suspicious of persons making unsolicited offers of services.

- Post a NO SOLICITING sign if you don't want any solicitor to ring your door bell, knock on your door, or make any other sound to attract your attention.
- Ask for photo identification before letting in anyone you don't know. Check out the identification with the company or agency if you are suspicious.
- Never let a stranger enter your home to use the telephone. Offer to make the call yourself in an emergency.
- Don't give your name, phone number, or whereabouts on your answering machine message. Never say you aren't home. Just ask the caller to leave a message.
- Don't leave your home keys on a chain with your vehicle keys when you use valet parking. Also, don't leave your garage door opener where it is easily accessible. Keep your vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any other papers with your home address on them where a criminal is not likely to find them.
- Don't give maids, babysitters, or others working in your home access to your home keys or alarm codes.
- Learn to recognize who belongs in your neighborhood and report any suspicious persons or vehicles to the SDPD by calling its non-emergency number, **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. If you see a burglary in progress call **911**. Examples of suspicious activities can be found on the page entitled *Reporting and Providing Information about Crimes and Suspicious Activities* under COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND RESPONSIBILITIES on this website.
- Call **911** if you are at home and think someone might be breaking in.
- Don't take direct action yourself. An officer will be dispatched to your address even if you cannot speak or hang up.
- Don't go in or call out if you return home and suspect someone has broken into your home, e.g., if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, or a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway. Go to a neighbor's home and call the SDPD.
- Don't discuss your assets or finances with strangers.
- Don't keep large sums of money at home.
- Keep valuable papers, stocks, bonds, expensive jewelry, coin collections, etc. in a bank safe deposit box. Don't store them at home unless you have a security closet or a safe that is well hidden and cannot be removed.

Here are some things burglars won't tell you. They come from interviews with convicted burglars.

- Of course I look familiar, I was here just last week cleaning your carpets, painting your shutters, or delivering your new TV.
- Thanks for letting me use the bathroom when I was working in your yard last week. While I was in there I unlatched the back window to make my return a little easier.
- Those nice yard toys your kids leave out make me wonder what type of gaming system they have.
- I might leave a pizza flyer in your front door to see how long it takes you to remove it.
- If glass is part of your front entrance, don't let your alarm company install the control pad where I can see if the alarm is set.
- If you don't alarm your windows, install motion detectors in the rooms I might enter, including the master bedroom where you usually keep your jewelry and home safe.

- Don't forget to lock your doors and turn on your alarm when you go out in bad weather. I work on those days too.
- I don't understand why you would you pay all that money for a fancy alarm system and leave your house without setting it.
- I always knock first. If you answer, I'll ask for directions or offer to clean your windows. But don't open the door or take me up on it. If you don't answer I'll try the door. Occasionally I hit the jackpot and walk right in.
- Do you really think I won't look in your sock drawer? I always check dresser drawers, the bedside table, and the medicine cabinet. But I almost never go into kids' rooms.
- I won't have enough time to break into that safe where you keep your valuables. But I'll take it with me if it's not bolted down.
- A loud TV or radio can be a better deterrent than the best alarm system. If you don't want to leave one on while you're out of town, use a timer that turns it on when you usually watch or listen to it.
- Sometimes I carry a clipboard. Sometimes I dress like a lawn guy. I do my best not to look like a burglar.
- The two things I hate most are loud dogs and nosy neighbors.
- I'll break a window to get in even if it makes a little noise. If your neighbor hears a loud sound he'll stop what he's doing and wait to hear it again. If he doesn't hear it again he'll just go back to what he was doing. It's human nature.
- I love looking in your windows. I'm looking for signs that you're home and for flat screen TVs or gaming systems I'd like. I'll drive or walk through your neighborhood at night before you close the blinds just to pick my targets.
- A window open a little to let in a little fresh air during the day is an invitation for me to come in. If you do that put something in the track that prevents someone from opening it wide enough to get through.

Providing Visibility

- Leave outside lights on after dark or have outside lights controlled by a motion detector. Make sure there are no dark areas around the house, garage, or yard in which a person could hide. Street lights are generally inadequate for illuminating your property.
- Check lights regularly and replace burnt out bulbs.
- Trim bushes to less than 3 feet to eliminate possible hiding places, especially near windows and sidewalks.
- Trim tree canopies to at least 8 feet to allow visibility into your property.
- Replace solid walls in front yards with open fencing to eliminate hiding places and make climbing more difficult.
- Install a wide-angle peephole in your front door so you can look out without being seen yourself.

Maintaining Your Property

- Keep property in good condition and free of trash, litter, weeds, leaves, graffiti, dismantled or inoperative vehicles, and other things that indicate neglect in caring for your property.
- Replace broken windows or screens.
- Repair broken fences and gate locks.
- Use screens, wired glass, or other protection for light fixtures and bulbs.

- Remove loose rocks and other objects that could be used to vandalize your property.

Protecting Your Home and Property When Your Are Away

- Lock all doors and windows. Use deadbolts, dowels, or locking pins in sliding glass doors and windows to keep them from being pried open.
- Never announce your vacation plans on Facebook, My Space, Twitter, or other social networking sites.
- Use timers on lights, radios, TVs, etc. to make them go on and off during the day and night to make your home appear occupied.
- Stop mail and newspaper delivery, or have neighbor pick up anything left at the home.
- Keep grass watered and cut. Water and trim other landscaping.
- Ask the neighbors to watch your home and report any suspicious activities.
- Leave your itinerary with a neighbor so you can be contacted in an emergency.
- Disconnect your electric garage door opener and padlock the door, preferably on the inside.
- Visit your local SDPD Area Station to request vacation home checks when you'll be out of town.
- Set your burglar alarm and notify your alarm company that you will be away. Then if an alarm occurs when you are away the company will not call your home first to verify the alarm; it will notify the police directly. Also provide the alarm company with an up-to-date list of persons to contact about the alarm and the need to secure your home after a burglary.

Providing Information on Residential Burglaries

If you have any information that might help solve a burglary and lead to the arrest of the burglar, call your local SDPD Area Station and ask to speak to the detective handling the case. Or you can call Crime Stoppers at its 24-hour hotline at **(888) 580-8477** and provide information anonymously. The operator on this will take your information and give you a code number. If your information leads to an arrest you could earn a reward of up to \$1,000. The operator will explain how you can use your code number to give additional information and how to collect your reward. You can also provide information by e-mailing from www.tipsubmit.com or by text messaging from a cell phone to **CRIMES** or **274637**, with **Tips409** at the beginning of the message. Crime Stoppers is a citizen-operated, non-profit organization that works in partnership with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to help solve serious crimes. It gives community members an opportunity to fight crime without "getting involved."

Making Sure the Police Can Find Your Home

- Make sure your street address number is clearly visible from the street and is well lighted at night so the police and other emergency personnel can locate your home easily. Numbers should be at least 4 inches high must be used on individual dwellings and duplexes, and 12 inches high on multiple-unit residential buildings.
- Make sure your unit number (in a multifamily housing development) is clearly visible from paths in the development. A directory or map that shows paths and unit locations should be placed at the main entrance of the development.
- Provide the SDPD with an entry code if you live in a gated community.

Identifying Your Property

- Etch your driver's license number on any valuables that might be stolen.
- Photograph valuables that cannot be etched.
- Keep a detailed, up-to-date record of your valuables. Include type, model, serial number, proof of purchase and fair market value.