

Burglary & The Holiday Season

By Captain Ed Bailey

Burglary refers to the act of breaking in. Most burglars do not wish to confront their victims. They would prefer to make an entry as quickly and quietly as possible. Burglars usually take items that are difficult to trace and can be sold quickly although there are reported cases of burglars taking the entire contents of a house. Most burglars do not fall into the "professional" class but instead are talented amateurs. The easiest type of entry is through an unlocked door. Estimates are that 40 to 60% of all residential burglaries are committed via unlocked doors or windows.

Burglars know that most people are creatures of habit. The first area they usually check for valuables is the master bedroom. Jewelry, money, and credit cards can almost always be found on or in a dresser or dressing table. The second place they may check will be an area where bills are paid.

Popular items include televisions, stereos, cameras, VCRs, cash, jewelry and credit cards. The burglar will usually sell the items for whatever price they will bring.

Burglars do not want to be seen or heard. They want to get in and out as soon as possible. **Keep all Christmas Gifts out of sight!** There are steps you can take to reduce your chance of becoming the victim of a burglar.

- Make sure all of your exterior doors are in sound condition. The doors should be of a solid construction of wood or steel with heavy hinges.
- All exterior doors should be equipped with good quality dead bolt locks. The locks should be the single cylinder type that is operated with a key on the outside and a thumb turn on the inside. The bolt should be at least 1 inch long.
- You should know how many keys are for your doors. If all of your locks are the same brand, they can be changed so that one key will operate all the locks. You should know who has keys for your door. If you have recently moved into a home or apartment, you should contact a locksmith to set your locks to a different key. You have no way of knowing how many keys the previous tenant had given out.
- If you have a sliding glass door, you should invest in a gar type lock that will secure the sliding part of the door when closed.
- Make sure all of the windows have some type of additional lock on them. If you open the windows often for ventilation, there are ways to secure them from being opened too far.
- Basement windows can be either replaced with glass block or protected with a grill or bar that would restrict the size of the opening if the glass is broken.

- Get to know your neighbors and form a neighborhood watch group. This can be one of the most effective tools against burglars. Neighbors who know each other tend to care more about each other.

Also remember when you take a vacation, burglars don't. When you go away for extended periods of time, try to make your home look like it is still occupied. Here are some things to remember before leaving on vacation:

- Have your lawn and yard maintained. If it is winter, arrange for your drive and walks to be shoveled or at least appear used.
- Stop mail and paper delivery or arrange to have them picked up each day.
- Put two or three lights on timers as well as a radio or television. Use lights that are normally in use in the home.
- Leave drapes, curtains and blinds as you normally would if you were home.
- Close and secure all of the doors to the garage. If you have an electric door opener, unplug it after the door is closed. Be sure to lock the walk-in door.
- Be sure all doors and windows are secured.
- Have a neighbor park their car in the driveway or leave your second car out in the drive.
- Ask a neighbor to use your trash cans and put trash out where you normally do on pick-up day.
- Consider hiring a house sitter for extended absences.
- Only tell people that you know and trust about your plans. The fewer people who know you will be gone the better. Not all burglars are strangers.
- Contact your local police department to see if they have a home check program. Many police departments will check homes of registered vacationers on a random basis. All information is strictly confidential.

In addition to following standard suggestions for securing your home, you may also want to contact the crime prevention officer of the Independence Police Department. Most law enforcement agencies with crime prevention officers or units will be happy to conduct a free security survey of your home. This general survey will help you pinpoint areas that need further attention.

If you are in the market for better locks or even an alarm system, the officer can provide you with information that will assist you in making an informed choice. While virtually all commercial alarm companies will offer to give you a free estimate, you receive from a crime prevention officer may help you decide if the product offered is proper for you and what you need it for: