

HOME SECURITY TIPS

Your first line of defense is to be consistent about locking your doors and windows. About a third of our burglaries are non forced which means a door or window was left open or unlocked. Many people believe window screens offer some protection but they do not. It is also common for people to leave windows open or unlocked when they are only gone for a short time. The average burglary is pretty fast, sometimes as short as five minutes, so develop the habit of making sure your home is secure every time you leave.

Most burglars look fairly average and "normal" for the neighborhood. Most are fairly young; from teens to thirties, and are alone or in pairs. Most are men but there are increasing numbers of women as they are usually seen as less suspicious. The standard method of "casing" a house is to knock on the door to see if anyone is home. If you are home it is a good idea to answer the door. Remember, you don't have to open the door to answer it; you can speak through the door. If it is a burglar and he gets no answer, he usually goes around to the side or back to break in. If you notice this behavior do not hesitate to call 911. Yes, you could be mistaken but it is better to call and have police check it out.

The strongest, heaviest door and locks are usually on front doors, so burglars head for side and back doors that tend to be weaker and are more hidden from view. All doors should be solid, and protected with good quality dead bolts. If your back door has a plywood panel on the bottom and/or glass in the top you can reinforce it without having to buy a new door. You can install exterior grade plywood over the bottom panel and plexi-glass or lexan over the window.

Additionally, **all** door frames should be reinforced with long screws that anchor the door frame to the supporting 2" x 4" next to the door. Dead bolt strike plates also need to be installed with screws that are long enough (usually 3" to 4") to reach the 2" x 4" stud parallel to the door. Currently, burglars are defeating dead bolt protected doors by shattering door frames, as it is usually weaker than the door or the lock.

Windows, especially sliding windows should fit snugly in their tracks. You can purchase plastic shims or install sheet metal screws in the upper track and leave them sticking out just enough to allow the window to slide but not be able to be lifted out of the frame.

Newer windows of all styles tend to have double glass and fit snugly. This is mostly for energy consciousness but it does make them more secure. If you have single pane windows or any window in a particularly vulnerable location you may need to add window locks. Burglars very rarely break out enough glass to crawl through; it's too dangerous and time consuming. What they do is break out just enough glass to reach inside and undo the latch. They then open the window and enter. A keyed window lock or one installed in a way that is hard to reach can keep them out. However, be sure that you have adequate fire escape routes, especially in bedrooms.

Most burglaries occur during the day or the early evening and most of the small percentage that happen at night are to obviously empty houses or to occupied homes that have left a door or window unlocked allowing for silent entry.

As the days shorten in the fall and winter, many people do not arrive home from work until it has been dark for an hour or two. A completely dark house in the late afternoon says "empty" and will attract the attention of burglars especially if they are familiar with the area and see it day after day. Use simple, inexpensive timers for lamps to give the impression that someone is home.

During the summer our non forced entry burglaries increase as more windows and doors are left open especially during hot weather. It is well worth the time it takes to close and lock all doors and windows when you leave the house and when you are in another room or out in the yard.

If you have a lot of thick bushes or overgrowth you may be providing hiding places for burglars. Clear out, thin or bottom prune to strike a balance between security and privacy.

If you have questions or want more information please contact Diane Horswill, Crime Prevention, North Precinct, Seattle Police at 684-7711 or diane.horswill@seattle.gov