

Safeguard Your Home From Burglars

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Some interesting statistics concerning break-ins in the United States:

Theft makes up more than three-quarters of all reported crime. In 2005, law enforcement agencies reported more than 2 million burglary offenses. According to a survey, burglars enter homes through the following locations:

- 81% enter through the first floor;
- 34% of burglars enter through the front door;
- 23% enter through a first-floor window;
- 22% enter through the back door;
- 9% enter through the garage;
- 4% enter through the basement;
- 4% enter through an unlocked entrance;
- 2% enter through a storage area; and
- 2% enter through anywhere on the second floor.

Some interesting statistics concerning break-ins in Canada (2002):

The burglary rate in Canada, at 877 per 100,000 people, is seven times higher than that of the country with the fewest break-ins, Norway. The burglary rate in Canada is slightly higher than that of the United States (at 746 per 100,000 people), but significantly less than the burglary rate in Australia, at 2,275 per 100,000 people. Consider the following safety measures:

Exterior Doors

- Doors should be made of steel or solid-core wood construction. Hollow-core wood doors are more easily broken than heavy, solid-core doors.
- Doors should be free of signs of rot, cracks and warping.
- Doors should be protected by quality deadbolt locks. Chain locks are not adequate substitutes for deadbolt locks, although chain locks may be used as additional protection.
- If a mail slot is present, it should be equipped with a cage or box. Mailslots that are not equipped with cages or boxes have been used by burglars to enter homes. If no box or cage is present, burglars can insert a contraption made of wire and cord into the mail slot and use it to open the lock from the inside.
- If a door is equipped with glass panes, they should be installed far from the lock. Otherwise, burglars can smash the glass and reach through the door to unlock the door.
- Spare keys should not be hidden in obvious locations. Burglars are very good at finding keys you believe are cleverly hidden. The best place for a spare key is in the house of a trusted neighbor. If keys must be hidden near the door, don't place them in obvious locations, such as under a doormat, rock or planter.
- Install a peephole in doors so you can see who is on the doorstep before you open the door.
- Consider installing bump-resistant locks. "Bumping" is a technique developed recently that can open almost any standard lock with less effort than is required by lock-picking. This technique uses "bump keys," which are normal keys with slight modifications. Lock companies such as Schlage Primus and Medeco manufacture a number of locks that offer some bump-resistance.

Pet Doors:

Pet doors can be used by burglars to enter homes. Some burglars have reached through pet doors in order to unlock the door. Don't install a pet door, but if one is necessary, it should be as small as possible and installed far from the lock. Another reason to forgo pet doors is that a crafty burglar may convince or coerce a small child to crawl through a pet door and unlock the door. Also, some burglars are children. Electronic pet doors are available that open only when the pet, equipped with a signaling device in their collar, approaches the door. These doors are designed to keep stray animals out of the home, and may provide protection against burglars, as well.

Sliding Glass Doors:

They should be equipped with locks on their tops and bottoms. They should not be able to be lifted from their frames. A cut-off broom handle, or a similar device, can be laid into the door track to prevent it from being opened.

Illumination:

Lights should be installed on the exterior of all four sides of the house. Burglars prefer darkness so they cannot be seen by neighbors or passersby. When you are not home, a few lights should be left on. It is helpful to install exterior lights that are activated by motion sensors. Burglars that are suddenly illuminated may flee.

Windows:

All windows should be composed of strong glass, such as laminated glass, and be in good operating order. Consider installing bars, grilles, grates or heavy-duty wire screening. Be aware that barred windows must be equipped with a quick-release mechanism so occupants can quickly escape during a fire. Windows should not be hidden by landscaping or structures. If landscaping or structures cannot be moved, lighting can be installed around the windows.

Landscape and Yard:

Shrubs and trees should not obscure the view of entrances. Shielded entrances can provide cover for burglars while they attempt to enter the residence. Fences are helpful burglar deterrents, although they should not be difficult to see through.

While the House is Vacant:

A loud radio can be used to make burglars think someone is home. Timers can be used to activate radios and lights to make the home appear occupied. A car should always be parked in the driveway. A neighbor's car can be parked there so that it appears as if someone is home. The lawn should be cut regularly. Uncut grass is a clue that no one is home.

Other Tips:

Dogs are excellent burglar deterrents. If you don't own a dog, place "Beware of Dog" signs around the yard for nearly the same effect. If no security system is installed, you can post security alarm stickers around the yard anyway.

In summary, there are plenty of things you can do to reduce the chance that your home will be burglarized. Ask an InterNACHI inspector if they think your home is unsafe during your next home inspection.