



COMMUNITY POLICING in Snohomish County

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Burglary– “It Takes a Thief”

If you are a cable TV viewer who enjoys The Discovery Channel, you may have watched a new program called *It Takes a Thief*. Two former burglars find a house that could be a likely target. One convinces the homeowner to let his buddy burglarize the house. The homeowner watches the burglary in a van nearby showing the homeowner and the viewers how he got in and the damage he causes. After 8 to 10 minutes its over. The stolen property is returned with a discussion of what the burglar can get for it. A crew cleans up the mess and we are shown prevention techniques as they are being installed.

The show also emphasizes the sense of loss, violation and anger that the victims experience.

In Snohomish County more and more homeowners are experiencing that same sense of loss, violation and anger. Between 2001 through 2004, our county has experienced a 32% increase in burglaries.

For police, catching burglars and recovering stolen items for victims is a tough proposition. Most residential burglaries happen in the middle of the day when no one is around in the neighborhood. Burglars try to go into a victims house unobserved and leave quickly. If there is any sign that others can see what they are doing and will call police, burglars will

move on to another house. They don't want to risk getting caught. They just want to get your stuff and be on their way as quick as they can.

The key to surviving a burglary is prevention– making it too hard for the burglar to get to your stuff.

If you watch the show, you can see that preventing a burglary encompasses two zones:

1. Outside of the house to the doors and windows.
2. Inside the house.

As a burglar drives or walks through a neighborhood he will look for visual cues that show him easy pickings. Your house should not shout to him “steal from me”.

Should a burglar get into your house, or if you have a contractor cleaning or otherwise working inside, there are things that you can do to protect your valuables.

Crime Definitions

Burglary– *Entering a building to commit a theft without confronting a victim.*

Robbery– *Taking or stealing property from a victim by violence or threat of violence.*



Neighborhood Watch—

One excellent way to make you home unattractive to a would be burglar is to join a Neighborhood (or Block) Watch. With a Neighborhood Watch:

1. Neighbors get to know each other and work together to prevent crime in their neighborhood.

2. Neighbors learn to recognize and report suspicious activities in their neighborhood.

3. Neighbors implement crime prevention techniques and strategies within their neighborhood and on their property.

Burglary Prevention— *Making Your Home Unattractive to a Thief*

In the TV program *It Takes a Thief* they show the two burglars “casing” a neighborhood. You can get some good clues on what dissuades a burglar from attempting to enter certain houses.

The key is to make your house look as unattractive as possible, to a burglar:

- A neatly trimmed front yard indicates that there is not anything lying around that a burglar could just pick up. Most importantly, keep the front of your house visible from the street. Bushes should be trimmed so that they are no higher than 3 ft high. Tree branches should be trimmed six feet off the ground. That way, your neighbors and passersby can see if anything unusual is happening.
 - Privacy fencing is very popular with homeowners. It is popular with thieves also. A cedar fence does an excellent job of hiding a burglar’s activities. If you want a fence in the front of the house, have a low fence or a metal decorative fence that people can see through. If you have a wood fence, especially for the back yard, be sure to have locks on the gate(s) that operate from the inside of the yard.
 - Don’t have things lying around. Especially ladders. If a burglar cannot get inside from the ground level he might be able to get inside from the second floor with a ladder. Also, don’t leave things that the burglar can use to break a window. Pick up your paper and solicitor’s handouts promptly. Having several papers lying around in your front yard will make the burglar think that you are gone on a trip.
- Keep your garage door closed. An open garage door is an invitation to take anything in it; your lawn mower, the expensive tool set, your car (especially if the keys are in it). Many times homeowners who are gardening in the back yard leave the garage doors open. A thief can enter the garage and even the house without you knowing.
 - Have the outside of your house well lit. While most burglaries happen during midday, they do happen at night also. Keeping your porch lights on at night and lighting dark areas of your property will dissuade most burglars. Lights connected to motion sensors are inexpensive and can startle a would be burglar.
 - Also, leave some interior lights on when you are away at night. This makes the house look lived in. Timers are also an excellent way to turn on (and off) lights in certain rooms.
 - If you have a security system, display the sign that says you have a security system. That will deter most burglars.



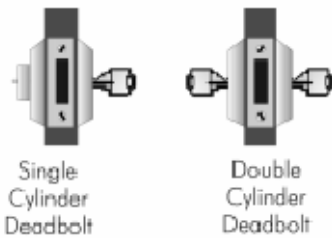
Burglary Prevention—Hardening the Target, Your Home

Some burglars might be more adventuresome than others. They might ignore the cues that you give them and try to get into your house anyway. So you need to make it hard on them to get to your stuff.

Doors and Locks- Exterior doors (and we consider the door from the house to the garage to be exterior) should be either solid wood core or metal.

Include dead bolt locks on all exterior doors. The bolts should extend at least one inch into the wall. The locks should be made of solid metal with no exposed exterior screws.

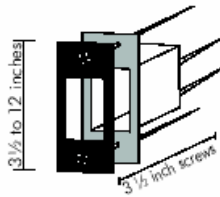
There are two types of dead bolts. Single cylinder dead bolts operate with a key from the outside and a thumb lever on the inside. Double cylinder locks use a key both inside and out. If the lock is near a window a double cylinder deadbolt prevents a burglar from breaking the window



then reaching around to open the door. **WARNING:** Double cylinder deadbolts can be a fire hazard. Leave the key in the lock on the inside of the door while you are in the house.

Be sure that your door has a heavy metal strike plate anchored to the

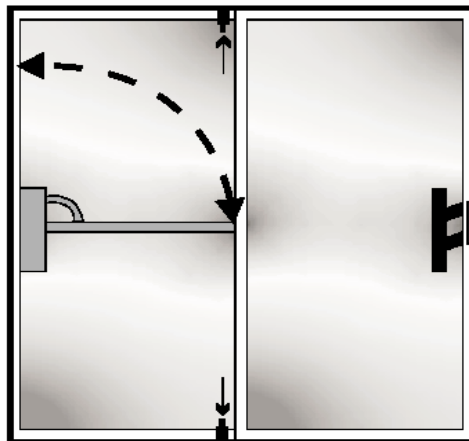
door frame with 3 1/2 inch screws to secure it to the wall stud. The plate and screws make it more difficult for a burglar to kick the door open.



Install a wide angle (180 degrees) peep hole in your front door, at the height of the

shortest person in the house, so that you can see anyone at your front door without opening it.

Many houses have sliding glass doors in the back leading to a porch or deck. These doors should have some sort of vertical locking mechanism in addition to the lock on the handle. Keyed locks or hand-tightened locks that attach to the top and bottom of the sliding door will prevent the door from being forced open. Another technique is a Charlie Bar that mounts on the wall side of the doorway and swings down to lock the door in place.



A Charlie Bar is in place to prevent an intruder from forcing the sliding door open. Vertical arrows show where to place keyed or hand-tightened locks.

Vacation Checklist—

When you are on vacation is an excellent time for a burglar to steal from your home. Burglars look for targets that appear to have been unoccupied for a while. Here are some practical things you can do to prevent becoming a victim:

- Leave a key with a trusted friend or neighbor and ask them to change the position of your blinds and drapes daily.
- Ask them to regularly pick up mail, advertising circulars, newspapers and debris during your absence.
- If you will be on an extended trip ask them to mow at least the front lawn.
- Place interior and exterior lights on a timer so lights go on at dusk and turn off at dawn.

Break Resistant Glass-

Highest Resistance (Unbreakable):

- Polycarbonate plastic vinyl-bonded laminated glass, 1/2 inch thick or more
- Acrylic plastic sheets, at least 3/8 inch thick

Medium Resistance (Vandal-Resistant):

- Wired glass, 1/4 inch thick
- Laminated glass, 1/8 inch thick
- Acrylic plastic, 1/8 inch thick, depending on specific chemical characteristics

Medium Resistance (Break-Resistant):

- Plate glass, 1/4 inch thick
- Conventional float or sheet window glass, more than 1/4 inch thick
- Tempered plate glass, at least 1/8 inch thick

Burglary Prevention— *Hardening the Target, Your Home cont.*

Windows. Another point of entry for a house is its windows. A burglar can open your window or break the glass to gain entry. In the past few years, the press has reported about summer burglaries and sexual assaults where the perpetrator gains entry through an open window. The victim leaves the window open to let cool air in.

Even without an open invitation of an open window burglars can go through windows that are unlocked. They will open the window catch with a pry bar or a sharp, pointed object. Others will try to remove a pane of glass by removing the glazing spline or putty with a knife. Still others may break the glass, reach in, and release the window catch.

Make your glass unbreakable-

Normal window pane glass is about 1/8 inch thick and easily broken. Replace this glass with thicker and stronger pane glass, or tempered glass, which is also stronger and will not cut someone who breaks it.

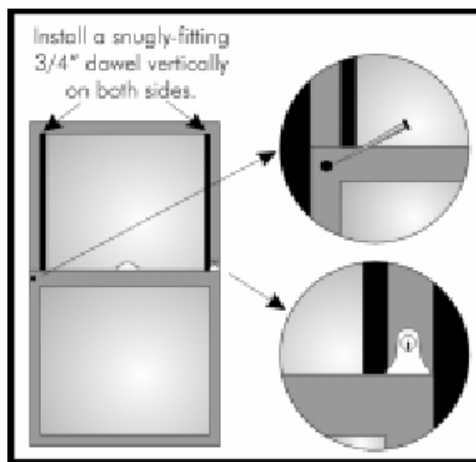
You can also secure a window by placing transparent polyester film on the inside glass. The film holds the glass together if the window is broken. Film is especially useful for sidelights and windows that could offer access to inside doorknobs and catches.

Secure your windows- An easy, inexpensive way to secure your windows is to use the "pin" trick. Drill an angled hole through the top frame of the lower window partially into the frame of the upper window. Then

insert a nail or eyebolt. The window can't be opened until you remove the nail. Make a second set of holes with the windows partly opened so you can have ventilation without intruders.

You can also snugly fit two 3/4 inch dowels vertically on both sides of the window about the bottom frame.

Another option is to install keyed or twist locks above the sliding portion of the window.



On the left: two dowels prevent the sliding portion of the window from opening. Upper right: shows the "pin" trick. Lower right: shows a keyed lock.



Burglary Prevention— *Inside Your Home*

The second zone that *It Takes a Thief* emphasizes is inside the house itself.

When their burglar enters the house he goes to the master bedroom first. There he looks in the common places for whatever valuables he can find. He flips over the bed to see what is hidden under it. He opens the dresser drawers looking for hidden cash or jewelry. He will look in the other bedrooms in a similar fashion.

He will make a swing through the kitchen dumping sugar, flower and other jars onto the floor (these are common stashes for cash). The kitchen is also a good place to find keys, usually hung near the door to the garage, to the car.

He will look for the desk where the victim does their bills. Here he can take the victim's checkbook, bank-card statements, bank statements, bills anything with an account number that he can use himself or sell to a ID thief.

Bolted safe- Almost always, the *It Takes a Thief* security experts will have a safe install, upstairs in the closet of the master bedroom. They will bolt the safe to the floor. This way a burglar (and his buddy) cannot take it away to open it later at his convenience.

The safe is where you put your valuables— jewelry, checkbook, important papers like birth certificates, social security cards, spare cash, spare keys, etc.

Another inexpensive option to a safe is to install a solid core or metal door with non-removable hinge pins and a dead bolt lock on one of your closets. This can secure larger items. Also, you can put a filing cabinet here with your bank and bankcard statements, your checkbook and your other personal records that a burglar might be interested in.

Operation ID- Burglars do not like marked items. Fences will not take marked stolen items or will not give as much money to the thief. Pawn shops will not take marked merchandise.

Engrave valuables that depreciate such as stereo's, computers, TV's, etc. with your driver's license number, preceded with the letters "WADL". DO NOT use your Social Security Number. Even if the burglar cannot sell your stuff he can use your Social Security Number for ID theft. Also, a police agency that recovers your stolen item can look up your driver's license much easier than it can look up your Social Security Number. Also, record the serial numbers of your valuables.

Do not mark things that appreciate such as jewelry, watches, paintings, etc. Obviously marking some valuables will detract from their value. Secure appreciating valuables in a safe, locked cabinet or room. Take pictures of appreciating valuables to document your ownership and to help in their recovery.

Make an Inventory— Document Your Belongings

Make an inventory of your belongings. Take pictures of the rooms in your house. Take pictures of individual items. If you have a digital camera you can take lots and lots of pictures. Even a camcorder can take good pictures of your valuables.

Make a list of your belongings with their description, and serial numbers where appropriate.

Keep copies of your list and photos at home and in a safety deposit box at your bank. This way if your house burns down, or is destroyed in the big earthquake that many people expect here in Puget Sound you can have access to your list to help you document what you lost for your insurance company.

If you are a victim of a burglary or theft, the list and pictures can help police recover your property and can help you claim your property.



COMMUNITY POLICING in Snohomish County

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Burglary Prevention– *Use Those Locks!*

In *It Takes a Thief*, after the experts have installed the new security devices and the victims have been shown how to use them, their burglar comes back to see if he can enter the house again.

Sometimes he can get in. Everything is locked except for possibly one door or one window. Nevertheless, the bad guy is in the house, again, ready to take their stuff, again.

The point is not to be paranoid. The point is to be in the habit of taking practical security precautions. Crime is all around us. The game is not to be victimized.

For a burglary to be committed, there must be three things that converge. A desire to steal (often a result of a drug habit), the ability to steal, and the opportunity.

As an individual you cannot control other people’s desire or ability, but you can control their opportunity to steal from you by using those locks!

