

PREVENTING RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES

Every day residential burglaries occur in San Diego. When officers investigate these crimes we can determine how and why a particular home or neighborhood was targeted. Most of these burglaries go unsolved because serial numbers were not recorded and given to the officer, the burglar wore gloves or they stole small easy items to sell quickly so they are never in possession of stolen goods for very long. Most burglary suspects drive through a particular neighborhood looking for easy targets, while others may have acquaintances that currently or previously lived in area and are familiar with the neighborhood or the residence. A large percentage of burglaries occur via unlocked doors, windows and gates.

Residential burglary suspects typically drive around our neighborhoods during daytime hours when most people are at work, looking for nice homes in quiet areas.

A common method of "casing," used by suspects in residential burglaries is lengthy door knocking and doorbell ringing in an attempt to determine if anyone is home. This method has been used on several recent occasions in many jurisdictions and is known to precede a burglary. If the door is answered by a resident, the suspect (caser) will claim to be lost, solicit some type of service or product, or ask for someone that does not live there. If this happens to you and you believe this person is not legitimate, please call the San Diego Police Department immediately at (619)531-2000. Try to obtain a good description, a direction of travel and a license plate if possible. Some sneaky homeowners have been able to obtain stealthy pictures on their cell phones without the suspected caser knowing their pictures were taken. Others have asked, do you mind if I take your picture in case you are not who you say you are. If they walk away in a hurry then you know they are not there for legitimate purposes.

If you do not want to answer the door, you can always yell from behind the closed door that you are not interested. If you are home and you do not acknowledge you are home, there is a possibility the suspect will attempt to break in. Should someone attempt to break into your home, call 9-1-1 immediately and flee the residence via an exit that is the farthest away from where the suspect is breaking in. Cell phones can be carried with you as you leave. Calling 9-1-1 from your cell phone will go directly to a San Diego Police Dispatch Center; however, you will need to give the dispatcher your address. If you are unable to speak, the dispatcher will be able to triangulate your location through GPS mapping software. Keep in mind this will cause a delay in response.

We also know that many residential burglaries occur in open garages where people are home but are either in the house or in the backyard. It is not uncommon for the homeowner to be working in the home or backyard and thieves go through the garage or an unlocked front door to steal valuables. Residents should lock their front doors, even when they are home, and close their garage doors when not present in their front yard.

Finally, we know that in most residential burglaries, the point of entry is the side or rear of the residence, out of sight of any passers-by. Often, a burglar breaks in at a rear sliding glass door, kitchen or bedroom window. Many times these portals are left unlocked. If the windows are locked, many burglars carry tools and will pry open sliding windows or even large sliding doors. The only way to stop these determined burglars is to use some type of pin locking device that prevents the burglar from removing the sliding door or window from

its track. Treat your side gate like your front door. Keep it locked! Even a small combination lock will deter most burglars to seek easier residences. Once a burglar makes it into your rear yard he is as good as in your house. Just like having large amounts of foliage in the front yard, if a burglar feels concealed from neighbors and the street, they will take the extra time to get in. If you have maintenance or pool service, buy a pushbutton combination lockset and give them the combination. The gate will simply self lock when they leave. Don't forget to change the combination periodically.

Once inside, almost all burglars go straight to the master bedroom or other areas where residents will likely store jewelry, cash or guns. If there is no alarm system, burglars will feel they have more time; and the rest of the house will be ransacked. Few televisions or DVD players are ever taken, but in addition to jewelry, cash and guns, laptops, cameras, cell phones and credit cards are also a common loss. We strongly recommend that residents secure a safe, professionally bolted to the floor for any type of valuable keepsakes that cannot be replaced, such as wedding rings or other family heirlooms. You may also consider keeping such items at the bank in a safety deposit box. Laundry rooms, bookcases, attics, refrigerators/freezers and even garages can also be used to make it more difficult to find your priceless valuables.

So how do you "harden the target" and at least reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of a residential burglary? Here are some suggestions:

- Consider owning a dog (burglars hate attention). If you don't have a dog, make it look as if you have a large dog. Simply putting a large dog toy inside the side gate may deter a burglar.
- Install an alarm system. IRIS sold at Lowes or similar home alarms are effective.
- Video surveillance systems are very affordable nowadays and a great deterrent.
- Visually inspect your rear yard. If a burglar enters undetected into your backyard, anticipate how he will try to break into your home, and "harden the target."
- Do not have an open door policy when it comes to burglars. Lock your front door, even when you are home.
- When no one is at home, always keep your doors and windows locked.
- Do not leave jewelry and cash where it is easy to find.
- Secure all your doors and windows when you leave.
- Install solid core doors with deadbolt locks.
- Use locking pins or dowels on sliding windows and doors (2" Gap if needed for ventilation.)
- Engrave a personal identification number on valuable items such as electronics.
- Take close-up, detailed photos of expensive jewelry.
- Prepare and keep safe, a list of valuable items and their serial or personal identification numbers.
- Use a radio/light timing device when on vacation. (Google Fake TV as an option)
- Have a neighbor pick up your mail and newspaper (or have it temporarily stopped), and check on your house periodically when you are on vacation. Arrange for a vacation check by our Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP) by calling (858) 552-1737.
- Be alert and observant. Alert neighbors are responsible for the majority of arrests made in residential burglaries. If something appears suspicious, immediately contact the San Diego Police Department at (619)531-2000, or dial 911 to report a crime in progress.