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Is Your Home At Risk?

By: Cst. Tom McKay

QUICK!

What's the single, most important thing that you can do to protect your property against burglary?

If you answered “present your home in such a way that the burglar fails to take notice of it and/or is discouraged from stepping foot on the property because it looks lived in”, you are on the right track! In order to safeguard your property, you must take precautions to ensure that your property is not noticed by criminals and you do nothing to entice them to step foot on your property.

Unfortunately, most of us get this wrong as our natural instinct is to think about ways to keep the burglar out, such as upgrading our locks, or reducing the amount they might take by installing an alarm. This tends to ignore the fact that most thieves pay little attention to the type of lock we have when assessing a property from the street. Instead, criminals look for opportunities that enhance their chances for success. In the case of residential burglars they look for:

- excessive amounts of landscaping,
- blocked sightlines that assist them ,
- adult-sized hiding spots around doors or windows,
- the presence of flyers, newspapers,
- unshovelled driveways, or
- lawns in need of maintenance.

Even the design of your house and its location can have an influence. It is therefore **absolutely critical** that you take a fresh look at the way your property presents itself and the opportunities it presents relative to your neighbours. Make sure that you:

- Trim/Remove excessive landscaping.
- Collect flyers and newspapers on a timely basis.
- Perform routine maintenance in a timely fashion.
- Make sure that the property looks lived in and someone is home – even when no one is home.
- Utilize timers for all lights that you leave on.
- Balance the need for privacy with the need for security when selecting fencing material.
- Keep ladders in a secure place that is out of sight
- Participate in mark your property programs like Operation Identification and prominently display warning decals.

REMEMBER ...

*Your best defense is to influence a burglar's decision to step foot on or notice your property.
Once they've made that decision, you have a very serious problem!*

Home Security: Myths & Realities

MYTH: **The Biggest Threat To Home Security Is From Home Invasions.**

*Ask the average person what is the greatest threat to their home security, and they will generally answer home invasions. While this would not seem surprising to anyone who regularly watches the six o'clock news, the reality is that home invasions are generally drug related and as such the average person is **rarely** targeted for this type of crime. In fact, if this were to actually happen it would likely be a mistake.*

A much greater, yet unreported, threat to homeowners is the threat of repeat burglaries. Residents are twelve times more likely to be burglarized once they have been initially targeted for a break-in according to one Canadian study. It is therefore vitally important that you seriously address your security shortcomings in the event that you suffer a break-in. This includes:

Is Your Home At Risk?

- *addressing the factors that attract burglars to and on your property (see *Is Your Home at Risk*)*
- *upgrading, and not just replacing, your locks and security hardware, and*
- *participating in a mark your property program along with Neighbourhood Watch.*

MYTH: A Properly Installed Alarm System Will Protect Me.

To the average person, a properly installed alarm system is the ultimate in security. Unfortunately, this view is not shared by the average thief! A thief knows that they can complete the average burglary, long before the police will have a chance to respond to the call (note: some police services no longer respond to burglar alarms). This fact is not well known to the general public for the following reasons:

- There is a widely held belief that the alarms go directly to the Police. **This is not the case!** It often takes a couple of minutes before Police are called by the alarm company.
- Police do not treat the alarm as a high priority call as the vast majority of alarms are false.

Other facts that you should know before you purchase an alarm:

- Most alarms will alert the alarm company using your phone line. This will make it impossible for you to call for immediate help in the event that you are home and someone tries to break into your house.
- An exterior mounted alarm with flashing strobe light is preferable to a monitored system as it may scare off the thief and result in neighbours making a 9-1-1. (A call received in this fashion, will be assigned a higher call priority than a call from a monitoring station).

Finally, it is important to be realistic as to why you are purchasing an alarm. If the principal reason you are purchasing the alarm is to provide you peace of mind while at home, you should remember that:

- most residential burglaries happen during the day, and
- that most burglars will avoid a premise if they suspect that someone is home.