

Keeping Your Home Safe from Break-Ins

Prepared by The Neighborhood Crime Watch Unit
Boston Police Department

The good news is that crime is down in Boston. Keep it that way by taking this opportunity to re-evaluate the security of your home.

DOORS AND WINDOWS

Figure out your weak spots. Imagine you are locked out of your house and absolutely have to get back in because you think you left the stove on. How would you break into your house? That area is probably a weak spot.

Doors

Install peepholes. Replace weak doors, reglue wooden panels, or attach metal plate or half-inch plywood liner to back. Or add decorative grillwork. If there is glass within 40 inches of the door, you can: cover glass with polycarbonate plastic sheet, add decorative grill or grill door, or replaced with solid-core door. Don't forget basement or porch doors.

Locks

Install good deadbolt locks with extra-long screws (2-1/2") on all doors (don't forget basement or porch doors). The bolt should extend at least 1 to 1-1/2" into the striker plate. If glass is within 40 inches of the lock, a double-cylinder deadbolt (keys for both sides) should be installed (but be sure to keep key readily available so you can exit quickly, if necessary). Or, the glass should be reinforced with lexan (polycarbonate plastic sheet). With this treatment, the criminal can't break the glass, reach in and unlock the door. Replace weak strike plate with a high-security, heavy-duty one. Don't forget to have good locks installed on back, porch, and basement doors.

Windows

Accessible double-hung windows can easily be pried open with a screwdriver. Storm windows do not add security. Crescent latch screws, can be popped out. Reinforce any accessible, wooden-double-sash windows by pinning them at the corners where the two sashes overlap. Drill at a slight downward angle all the way through the lower window and halfway through the upper window. Insert long nails (can be easily removed for emergency exit). For ventilation, drill additional holes no more than 5 inches above the first holes in the upper window frame.

Sliding Doors and Windows

Brace with a locking device that attaches to the frame. A wooden pole or broomstick handle in the base channel can be pried out, so install a key-operated locking device. Exterior thin gauge aluminum can be peeled to gain entry, so tighten adjustment screws to prevent lifting door out of channel.

Casement Windows

Casement windows can be easily forced or pried if the crank operator is loose. Adjust to reduce excess play. Remove the crank when not at home so that windows can't be pried.

Obstructed Views

Any accessible door or window that is shielded from view by shrubs or entryways is a potential weak spot. Trim shrubs (especially around first floor and basement windows). For entryways that obscure doors, make sure the area is well lit. Use motion detector lights. Always keep outer doors locked. Never buzz people in without knowing who is there. (It's much easier to keep an intruder out than to get him out.)

Garage Doors

On overhead track-operated doors, locks are usually poor quality. Panels that are thin or made of glass can be kicked out or broken. Overhead tracks may have loosened. Install case-hardened hasps and padlocks on the outside. Reinforce weak panels (see **Doors** above). Secure track with heavier screws. Pin track above bar by drilling two holes and inserting heavy nails or bolts. For double outswing doors, install heavy-duty surface bolts at top and bottom of inactive door. Install case-hardened hasp and padlock on outside or inside.

Alarms

Consider installing an alarm on the doors and windows that are the most vulnerable.

Porches

Porch doors and windows are often obscured from view and should therefore be as secure as possible. Don't forget upper story porch doors and windows. See **Doors** and **Windows** above.

LIGHTING

Adequate exterior lighting and interior timers are important. Motion detector lights add the element of surprise and are economical.

Exterior

All entrances should be well lit. Leave porch or front door light on from dusk to dawn. Use motion detector lights on sides and back of house).

Interior

Use timers for lights when you are away or have any change in your schedule to create the appearance that your home is occupied.

Yard and Neighborhood Maintenance

Keep your yard and neighborhood well maintained. A deteriorating street conveys the message to criminals "nobody here cares or is watching out." Any time spent out on your street or front yard, gardening, shoveling or sitting on your porch is valuable for overall neighborhood safety. You get to know who lives there, you share information, and you create a watchful presence.

- Never keep ladders or things for a thief to stand on in your yard. They can be stolen or used to hoist a thief up to a window.
- Don't display packaging of expensive new items in your trash.
- Make sure your house number is clearly visible from the street.
- With your neighbors make sure street lights, vacant lots and other common areas are well maintained on your street.
- Make sure that the elderly people living on your street get their walks shoveled and get their trash taken out in bad weather. It is important that their homes look lived in and well maintained also.

Know Your Neighbors

- Start a Crime Watch and make sure you can contact neighbors when you need to.
- A phone tree is a simple and effective way to feel safer on your street. You can quickly ask for help or alert neighbors to a suspicious incident with this tool.
- Leave a key with a trusted neighbor (never under a mat).

Know Your Neighbors, continued.

- Arrange for mail and newspaper pick-up, snow removal, and grass-mowing when away.

What to Do When . . .

You hear a burglar alarm.

Investigate from a safe distance, call 9-1-1, and then call your neighbor.

You see something suspicious.

Call 9-1-1, and then call your neighbors.

You see a stranger in the neighborhood.

Say "Hello." You create a sense of neighborhood where people look out for one another. If the unfamiliar person is there legitimately, then no harm done. If he is intent on committing a crime, then he has been identified and will most likely go elsewhere.

Keep a List of Your Valuables

Include descriptions and serial numbers of electronic and stereo equipment, cameras, computers, sports equipment, jewelry, silver pieces, home office equipment, and power tools. Consider photographing or videotaping these possessions to document them.

For more tips, link to www.bostoncrimewatch.com