

# Safe Neighborhoods, Secure Homes

*A basic, yet comprehensive guide to crime prevention in  
your home and automobiles.*



A community service project of the  
**Travis County Sheriff's Office**  
**Community Outreach Unit**

## **Disclaimer**

The information provided in this manual should be considered as minimal recommendations to reduce the opportunity for a crime to occur. Following these suggested guidelines in most cases will help keep you from becoming a victim. However, it should be noted there are no absolutes and each situation may have different circumstances.

Also, there is no such thing as a crime-proof structure or building, and anything that is made by man can be defeated by man. By following these strategies, you will make committing a crime more difficult for the offender, thus likening the possibility he will search out another, easier target.

Questions regarding the information contained within this guide can be obtained from the Community Outreach Unit at (512) 854-9770.

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## Introduction

Burglary is the fastest growing felony crime in America. Crime statistics indicate a burglary is committed in Texas every two minutes. The next one could be your home. Of the billions of dollars worth of property stolen each year, only a small percentage is recovered. Property crimes also place individuals at risk for serious personal crimes as well. These can occur because people fail to protect their homes and families against illegal entry.

As the crime rate continues to climb, citizens must take extra steps to protect themselves against crime. The rules for protecting your home are very simple and basic. Two of the best measures you can take are good common sense and good solid locks. The steps that follow in this booklet are day-and-night, year-round precautions that will work effectively – if you use them.

You cannot make a house completely burglary-proof, but you can make entry so difficult the burglar will go elsewhere in search of an easier target. Burglars tend to avoid those homes which will take time to gain entry, or where a substantial amount of noise will be generated in breaking in. Both time and noise will increase the chances of the burglar being discovered and ultimately apprehended.

Crime prevention is a job for you and your neighbors because you are in the best, and often the only, position to do it. The criminal justice system – law enforcement agencies, courts and prisons – primarily deals with crime after it occurs. Law enforcement agencies arrest criminals and play a role in preventing crime, but can never take the place of strong ties among people in the community. It is neighbors who have the most power to stop crime from happening in the first place.

This booklet is produced with the same community initiative in mind. It is a basic overview of steps that citizens can take to help reduce the opportunity for crime to occur in their community. If citizens do not get involved, crime will continue to increase. Crime and the fear of crime threaten a community's well-being. Crime in turn feeds on the social isolation it creates. You and your neighbors can prevent or break this vicious cycle, and in the process, build your community or neighborhood into a safer, friendlier, and more caring place to live.

# Home Security

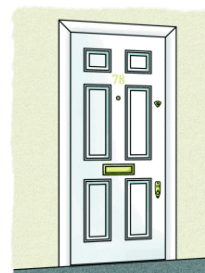
## Doors and Frames

All exterior doors should be either metal or solid core wood and should be at least 1-3/8 inches thick. Hollow core and panel doors do not provide the security of a solid core door and should not be used on the exterior of your home.

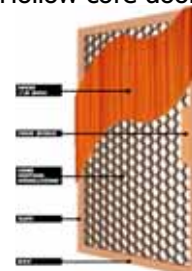
Never open the door to anyone unless you know them. A simple, inexpensive safety device is the one way, wide angle door viewer. For your personal protection, all exterior entry doors should be equipped with a wide angle door viewer of 190 degrees or more. This will allow you the ability to see who is at your door without unlocking it. Door chains or other similar devices do not offer you adequate protection against an intruder.

Door frames often provide little protection against a pry bar. Most door hinges and dead bolt lock strike plates are fastened to the door jamb with 1/2 inch screws. Many times the door jamb is poorly attached to the main frame of the house as well. Replacing these screws with two inch screws will help to reinforce the strike plate, making it more difficult to gain entry.

Metal / Solid core door



Hollow core door



## Locks

The most important thing to remember about locks is to use them every time you leave the house, even if for just a few minutes during the day. The most popular times for residential burglaries are weekday, daylight hours. In more than one third of burglaries, there is no forcible entry. In those cases, someone simply left a door or window unlocked and in essence, invited the burglar inside. Good locks offer no protection if you leave extra keys in obvious places like under the doormat or in flower pots.



The majority of all doors are equipped with a standard entrance latch (also called a spring latch or key-in-the-knob latch). These devices do not provide adequate security. They have a spring which holds a latch in place.

They can be defeated by wrenching the knob with a large pair of pliers, by sliding a credit card between the door and the frame, by kicking the door, or by spreading the frame with the pry bar. These types of latches should never be depended upon as the sole manner to secure your exterior doors.

The single cylinder dead bolt is key operated from the outside only. The interior operation is a thumb knob. This lock is best utilized where there is no glass in the door or within 40 inches of the lock mechanism. When purchasing a dead bolt lock, it is important that the lock has a bolt, which is constructed of case hardened steel, extends a full one inch out and locks into place. When fully extended, the bolt should not be able to be pushed back in by hand. Also, it is important the hole in the door frame is sufficient depth to allow the bolt to be opened the full one inch, otherwise it cannot lock in place and can be pushed back with a knife or screwdriver.



A double cylinder dead bolt lock is key operated from both the inside and outside. It should be used on the doors where there is breakable glass in the door or within 40 inches of the locking mechanism. This makes it impossible for the burglar to break the glass and reach inside to unlock the door.



For security reasons, you should not leave a key inserted in the inside portion of the double cylinder lock, but at the same time, you should understand without proper preparation, a double cylinder deadbolt can become a fire hazard. In addition to keys kept on your family's key chains an extra should be kept close to the door (taped under a coffee table or stair banister, etc.) where

every member of the family knows the location and can easily access it in case of an emergency. You should weigh the importance of your family's safety in a fire or other emergency before deciding to use double cylinder deadbolt locks.

*\* Note: If your home is located inside of the city limits of Austin, the installation of double cylinder deadbolts may be prohibited by a Life Safety Code. If you live within incorporated city limits of any municipality, you should first check with your local police crime prevention officer, or building code inspector before installing double cylinder deadbolt locks.*

Sliding glass patio doors can be among the easiest entry points for burglars. Special locks are available to secure the door against lifting and prying. Installing a “Charlie Bar” can help keep the sliding door from being pried open. A cheaper Charlie Bar can be constructed using an old broom handle or other wooden stick. It should be cut to the exact length of the exposed door track and placed so that the door cannot be opened when forced.

To prevent the sliding glass door from being lifted out of it’s tracks, it should be pinned. This can be accomplished by purchasing a specially designed door pin, or by drilling a hole in the door frame and inserting a nail.



Windows can also be pinned in the same manner to prevent them from being pried open. Drill a small downward sloping hole into the sliding portion of the window

and into the frame of the fixed or stationary part of the window. You can then insert a nail or pin to help prevent the window from being pried open.



If you do not want to drill a hole in your window, a track lock is available that will fit any type of aluminum window. The lock features a thumb screw which clamps down on the track and prevents the windows from being pried open. This type of lock allows you to open the window for ventilation without compromising security. These track locks can be purchased at any hardware store.

## Exterior Security

A very important consideration in securing your home is to make sure the exterior is uninviting to a burglar. Prune back shrubbery that hides the doors and windows or behind which a burglar could conceal himself. Cut back any tree limbs from which a burglar could reach an upstairs window.



Keep your yard well maintained. This gives the appearance that you care about your home and have taken steps to protect it. Store ladders and tools inside of your garage or storage shed and make sure these storage areas remain locked and well secured at all times.

Light porches, entrances and yards – front and back. Good exterior lighting is important, particularly when the yard area is obscured by trees and shrubbery, or if these are dark areas.

You can buy inexpensive timers, photoelectric cells, or motion detectors to turn lights on and off when needed. Clearly display house numbers so that law enforcement or other emergency responders can find your home quickly.



Help the neighborhood stay in good shape. Dark alleys, broken street lights, abandon cars, vacant buildings, graffiti, litter, and other run down areas attract crime. Work with your local government agencies and your neighbors to correct the problems and to clean up your neighborhood.

## Apartments and Condominiums

People who live in condominiums or multi-unit buildings have special security considerations, especially since there are many people coming and going much of the time. Many times it is difficult to get to know your neighbors because of the population of multi-unit buildings. Residents tend to be transient or live at the property a short time before moving elsewhere. Another consideration is that you must go through the management company or landlord to make security improvements.



Some of the things you may want to consider when living in a multi-unit building or complex is whether the landlord has taken steps to ensure your protection. Many of these precautions are dictated by state law, especially in Texas. Does your entry door have a strong deadbolt lock and peephole? Is there a keyless deadbolt which allows you to lock the door while inside of your apartment? Does the sliding glass door have a wooden dowel in the track so it can't be opened, and pins in the frame to prevent it from being lifted out? Does the landlord or building manager have strict control over keys and are apartments re-keyed after someone moves out?



You should also check out your building and see if there is some control over who enters and leaves the building. Are walkways, entrances, parking areas, hallways, stairways, laundry rooms, and storage areas well-lighted, 24 hours a day? Are mailboxes in a well traveled well-lighted area and do they have good locks? Is the property well-maintained? Are burned out lights fixed properly? Are shrubs trimmed and trash removed in a timely manner? You are also encouraged to check out your neighbors. Get to know who they are. Join or organize an Apartment Watch group so you and your neighbors can look out for and help each other. Work with the landlords or building managers to sponsor social events for tenants. Look beyond problems to root causes--does your building need a better playground, a social evening for teens, a tenant association, new landscaping, a basketball court? Work with the management for changes that make everyone proud of where they live.

## **Home Security When You're Not Home**

Most burglars prefer to break into your house when no one is home, therefore anything you can do to make your house appear occupied will discourage burglars from picking your house as their target. Fortunately, it is relatively simple to make your house appear occupied. Don't leave obvious clues that you are gone.

Don't leave notes on the door advertising you are gone or will be returning at a specific date and time. Make sure someone picks up the newspapers or deliveries. It is best not to cancel any mail or newspaper deliveries because that is letting someone know that you will be gone.

Have a neighbor or friend you trust look after your house while you are gone. Ask them change the drapes or blinds around to appear as if someone is home. Request a neighbor to park their car in your driveway and to move it around occasionally. You can also have your neighbor put their garbage out in front of your house. If you are going to be gone for an extended period of time, have someone scheduled to mow your lawn for you as well.



While it is important for some people to know you will be gone, don't tell everyone. The fewer people that know you will be gone, the better. Ensure you leave a TV or radio on, and have several lamps placed on automatic timers.

## **Operation ID**

OPERATION IDENTIFICATION is the name given to a nationwide program of marking personal property indelibly with a unique number which acts as a means of discouraging burglary and thefts. Operation ID also permits positive identification of the items if lost or stolen. In communities where it has been properly implemented, the program has shown dramatic results in its ability to reduce burglaries and thefts.

The greatest benefit is that it acts as a deterrent. Without identifying numbers, the stolen property can be sold to pawnshops, flea markets, fences, and even on the streets to other criminals. Burglars know it is many times impossible to dispose of stolen property that is properly marked. It increases the burglar's chance of discovery and ultimately their apprehension. On the other hand, many law enforcement agencies have property rooms full of stolen property they are unable to return to the rightful owner. This is mainly because there are no identifying numbers or the owner did not know the serial numbers of the items making them difficult or unable to be traced. Here is how the program works. Operation Identification is comprised of three parts:

1. MAKE A LIST of all your valuables and keep a copy in a safe place. If you should ever become a victim of a burglary or a theft you will be able to quickly describe the stolen property from the list. Be sure to include the BRAND NAME of the item, the MODEL NUMBER, and the SERIAL NUMBER. This information is important so that the officer who takes the report can enter your stolen items into the National Crime Information Center computer. Property entered into the NCIC computer can be recovered throughout the United States if an officer in a particular state runs the serial number.
2. ENGRAVE YOUR DRIVERS LICENSE NUMBER on the item. DO NOT use your Social Security number. Engrave your Drivers license number onto the item preceded by the two letter abbreviation for the state, i.e.: TEXAS = TX. The eight digit number should then be followed by DL if you have a drivers license or ID if you have a state issued identification card. When you are through your number should look like this:



TX12345678DL or TX 12345678ID

Be sure and engrave the number somewhere it cannot be altered or dismantled from the item. It is a good ideal to mark the item in two places. First, where it can be easily seen by looking at the item. Second, somewhere such as the bottom or inside of the case where the burglar cannot not easily see it. That way if the first number is somehow removed you will still be able to identify your property. Make sure you indicate in your inventory where you marked the item. Place a small Operation ID sticker next to the first number to let everyone know that the item has been marked.

3. PHOTOGRAPH each one of your valuables. Especially if the item is hard to describe or cannot be engraved, such as custom jewelry. Insurance companies encourage individuals to photograph or video all of their insured possessions. This makes filing a claim easier and quicker because you have proof of ownership. This also gives law enforcement a better chance of identifying your property.

Remember that it in order for Operation Identification to work as a deterrent to a crime, the burglar must be aware that you have taken steps to mark your property. Place an Operation Identification label on each door and window to show that you are participating in Operation ID. Electric engravers can be purchased at any hardware store for less than \$20.

## Neighborhood Watch

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention activity that enlists the active participation of citizens in cooperation with law enforcement to reduce crime in their communities. It involves:

- ◆ Neighbors getting to know each other, taking the time to care about each other, and working together in a program of mutual assistance.
- ◆ Citizens being trained to recognize and report suspicious activities in their neighborhoods.
- ◆ Crime prevention strategies such as home security, Operation ID, and other programs being implemented by citizens.

Neighborhood Watch was created to obtain citizen involvement discouraging and preventing residential crime. Neighborhood Watch programs are not designed as substitutes for police protection, rather they supplement police activities by providing extra eyes and ears. When neighbors know each other personally, they are more aware of each other's habits and routines. This awareness in turn makes them more observant of such activities which are suspicious or out of place. Examples of these activities include strange cars in the neighborhood or suspicious persons who are at your house while you are away.

The participants make their neighborhood a safer place to live by becoming more active and involved in their neighborhood activities. As a result, they become more aware of problems when they occur. This will not take a lot of time and soon will develop into a daily routine of watching out for what goes on in your neighborhood. Neighborhood Watch programs help to create an identity within the neighborhood, which in turn fosters a sense of pride and belonging for the participants.

Neighborhood Watch operates to educate participants in the principles of deterrence, delay, and detection. The program depends on a communications network organized within three levels of participants: the residents, block captains, and representatives from the Travis County Sheriff's Office Community Outreach Unit. Reduction in burglary is likely because it is a well-publicized program of prevention and target hardening, coupled with citizen concern for the safety and security of the neighborhood.



Talk with your neighbors and friends. Explain that you would like to start a Neighborhood Watch group and ask them to participate in taking the first steps in starting a Neighborhood Watch program.

Discuss crime problems in your area. Community Outreach Unit officers can assist you in determining the extent of the crime problem and provide you with information on specific crime statistics for your neighborhood. Briefly explain the value of the Neighborhood Watch program and its potential impact on local crime.

Call the Travis County Sheriff's Office Community Outreach Unit at 854-9770. If you live in the incorporated city limits, contact your local police department. Explain your desire to start a Neighborhood Watch program in your area and ask for assistance. Coordinate a date and time with the officer for the first Neighborhood Watch orientation meeting. Make arrangements to use a convenient meeting place that will accommodate the number of people expected to attend. If the size of the group allows, meet in someone's home to foster an informal, comfortable atmosphere.

Unless Neighborhood Watch organizations continue to pursue worthy goals they will eventually stagnate and die. Keeping neighbors united in a general effort to improve their common environment is the most effective and worthwhile way to avoid the onset of apathy.

Remember that a neighborhood's very appearance immediately signals to prospective intruders whether or not the residences are easy targets. Getting involved in other projects such as improving sidewalks, fences, landscaping, security lighting, and the appearance of homes and lots gives neighbors a sense of accomplishment and pride in their community. At the same time it sends a message to criminals that the citizens care about themselves and their homes. Expanding the group's purpose to include training in fire prevention, first aid, personal safety, and health is a productive way to keep it active.





## Security Alarm System

Installing an alarm and electronic security system in your home or business is an added defense against intruders. People who live alone, or who are away from home for long periods of time should consider the addition of a security system. If you have a large amount of valuable items in your home, or if you live in isolated area, the installation of an electronic system may be a wise investment as well.

A security alarm can act as a deterrent to burglaries and theft because the common burglar would not want to waste time trying to defeat a burglar alarm. The sounds of an audible alarm will most likely scare a burglar away before he is able to complete his crime.

Alarm systems can sometimes be utilized without having them monitored by an alarm system. They may be able to be set to alert or make audible sounds in certain circumstances. Bear in mind that if the alarm is not monitored by the company, law enforcement will not respond upon activation of the alarm.

Insurance companies routinely offer a premium discount to homeowners who have installed alarm systems meeting certain guidelines. Those guidelines are available from any law enforcement agency, the Texas Department of Insurance, or your insurance agent.

Keep in mind that you get what you pay for. Quality equipment and service will not necessary come cheap. No matter how good the system is, it must be installed properly by competent installation personnel to be effective. Remember that no system is completely foolproof. Some burglars are so quick they can break into a home and be gone with thousands of dollars in merchandise in a matter of minutes, before the police can arrive. Some burglars have been known to defeat some burglar alarms, by cutting the power supply or phone line. Be sure to ask the alarm company what features are available that can ensure that this does not happen.



## Auto Theft

A vehicle is stolen every 19 seconds in the United States and in recent years, over 1,600,000 vehicles were stolen. Stolen cars, vans, trucks, and motorcycles cause economic hardship for victims, increases premiums, and may be used to commit other violent crimes. Everyday, cars and trucks are stolen from malls, streets, driveways, parking lots and garages, and dealerships. Vehicle theft can happen any place and at anytime. A few common sense steps can help you avoid being a victim of the nations fastest growing property crime.

- ◆ Never leave your car running unattended.
- ◆ Never leave your keys in the car or ignition.
- ◆ Never leave valuables in plain view, even if your car is locked. Put them in the trunk or out of sight.
- ◆ Install a mechanical device that locks to the steering wheel, column, or brake to prevent the wheel from being turned more than a few degrees. Commonly called clubs, collars, or J-bars, these devices can act as a deterrent if installed properly. Investigate the purchase of a auto security system if you live in a high-theft area or drive a theft prone vehicle.
- ◆ Always leave just the ignition key with the attendant, if you park in a commercial garage or lot. Make sure no identifying information is attached. Do the same when you take your car for repairs.
- ◆ Carry your registration and insurance card with you. Don't leave personal identification documents or credit cards in your vehicle.
- ◆ Copy your license plate and vehicle identification (VIN) numbers on a card and keep them with your driver's license. If your vehicle is stolen, the police will need this information promptly.



## **Carjacking**

Carjacking (stealing a car by force) has captured headlines across the country. Statistically, your chances of being a carjacking victim are very slim, and preventative actions can reduce the risk even more.

- ◆ If the carjacker has a weapon, give up your car with no questions asked. Your life is worth more than your car.
- ◆ Keep your car doors locked and windows closed at all times while you are in your vehicle.
- ◆ Be especially alert at gas stations, shopping malls, convenience and grocery stores, and intersections. These are all likely spots for carjackers.
- ◆ Park in well-lit areas with good visibility, close to walkways, stores, and people.
- ◆ Approach your car with keys in your hand. Look around before getting in, especially underneath the car. Make sure there is no one hiding inside of the car before entering it.

If your car is stolen, report it to the police immediately. The sooner the police are notified, the better your chances are of recovering your vehicle.

## **H.E.A.T**

Texas H.E.A.T. (Help End Auto Theft) is a voluntary statewide vehicle registration program designed as a theft deterrent. Vehicle owners can sign an agreement with their local participating law enforcement agency that their vehicle is not normally used between 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. The agreement gives blanket authorization to any law enforcement officer in Texas to stop the registered vehicle anytime it is seen being operated within the prescribed time frame, and to verify ownership by the vehicle operator. Vehicle owners can also grant additional authority at the time of registration to have their vehicle stopped anytime of day if it is being driven from Texas into Mexico.

To register your vehicle, contact the Auto Theft Unit of the Travis County Sheriff's Office at (512) 854-9721. City of Austin residents can register through the Austin Police Department. A vehicle owner must present the following to the registering law enforcement agency:

- ◆ The vehicle to be registered
- ◆ Certificate of Title (copy is acceptable)
- ◆ Valid driver's license
- ◆ Proof of insurance or vehicle registration receipt
- ◆ Telephone number where the vehicle owner may be reached between 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m.

Registration is for a period of four (4) years. There is no fee to register your vehicle. For more information on the Texas H.E.A.T. program contact the Travis County Sheriff's Auto Theft Unit at (512) 854-9721.





For additional information on  
other programs offered by the  
**Travis County Sheriff's Office**

contact the

**Community Outreach Unit**

Keith Ruiz Building

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- ★ Neighborhood Watch
- ★ Operation ID
- ★ Personal Safety Programs
- ★ Auto Theft Prevention
- ★ TRIAD/S.A.L.T. (Seniors and Lawmen Together)
- ★ Capital Area Security Council
- ★ National Night Out Against Crime
- ★ Sheriff's Citizens Academy
- ★ Family Violence Prevention
- ★ Youth programs

