

Home Security

When most people think of home security they think about securing their home from break ins when they're NOT at home. That's fine, but it's only dealing with one part of the problem and, given that the average home owner has their contents insured against theft, it's the minor part of the problem.

The crime that's sadly on the increase is that of home invasion, which is when the bad guys attack your home while you, and your family, are inside. When it originally began it was usually a disgruntled drug dealer going round to get even with his competition. Unfortunately, once they realized how easy it was, they began attacking anyone's home, providing it looked like a viable target.

In this article we're going to be dealing with both types, i.e. securing your home when you're away and doing the same when you're in residence.

We can break down the home invasion attacks into 3 primary categories;

1. **All Out Assault** – This is when the attackers hit your abode without any warning at all. Asleep or awake, the first warning you get is the sound of a window breaking, a door caving in under the force of kicks or someone running into your house.
2. **Surreptitious Entry** – This is when the bad guys enter your house (typically when it's dark) through a breach in your perimeter such as an open or unlocked door or window.
3. **Deception** – This is where the criminals will prey on the milk of human kindness and use ploys to gain entry. They may send a female accomplice made up to look as if she's been in an accident to ask to use the phone or they might come to the door asking for directions to a nearby landmark. Either way, once the door is open the rest of the gang invades.

Just as in the military, when we protect an objective by using concentric rings of increasingly difficult layers of security, we do the same with our homes. Our first objective therefore is to deny easy access. The outermost ring then becomes the city you live in (is it a dangerous metropolis or relatively safe) followed by the neighborhood and/or subdivision. Next would be such things as a neighborhood crime watch group, alert neighbors, street layout (cul-de-sac or cut through?), lighting, the police etc.

The next layer is our own yard. Do you have a fence, do you have motion detector lights covering the entire yard and have you trimmed the hedges and bushes back so they do not provide a hiding space up against the house?

Our next layer is the house itself and specifically windows and doors. Are they good, is the frame solid, are you using quality locks and deadbolts? What about other entry points such as skylights, dog flaps and garages?

Let's backtrack for a second. Are you aware of the crime statistics for your neighborhood? You should be. If you're not, and there's a spate of break-ins in the sub-division, you're not going to be as prepared as someone who knows of them and has taken relevant precautions. What about the direct number to the local police station? Is it manned after hours? What's the police response time like? Are they a good force or corrupt? (Fortunately less of a problem here than in some countries). Do you know your neighbors? Do you take part in the local crime watch group? Does your neighborhood have one? If not, why not? Do your neighbors care about you and the neighborhood? Do they like you enough to call the police if they see something suspicious?

Back to the yard. Do you have a fence? Is it a privacy fence which might prevent neighbors seeing an attack or burglary taking place? Is it chain link, solid or flimsy? Is it hooked up to an alarm system? Have you eliminated all dark areas (criminals love them) by installing motion detectors? Have you contemplated gravel garden beds which make covert movement difficult and noisy?

What about the house proper? A good rule of thumb is to ask yourself if you could break your door down with a hefty kick or by ramming it with your shoulder. If the answer is yes, then so can the bad guys. You don't need armor plating and or cages but you can do a decent job of reinforcing the frame and upgrading your locks and deadbolts without making your home look like a fortress. Remember not to hide a key outside. Any pro crook can find it in less than five minutes, no matter how creative you think you've been. How about the windows? Double glazed and excellent quality or cheap? If they were broken, is access to the house then easy or do they have to climb over a glass coffee table or aquarium etc? Have you upgraded the remote for the garage to one that changes codes on a regular basis? If you have the older system a lot of generic garage door openers will work and criminals will drive down the street pointing them at doors until they find one of the same frequency. (The old doors had about five different frequencies and there have been instances whereby a neighbor's remote would open the neighbor's garage door. Not good! Finally, play the part of a bad guy. Think outside the box a little and figure out how you'd get in without a key if that was your goal. On a commando course in the Foreign Legion I got into a heavily alarmed house by lifting tiles on the roof and going in that way. Lastly, seriously considering buying a dog. Even an untrained one, or one not particularly suited to man-stopping, will still bark and give you advance warning of someone creeping round outside. With their superior hearing and sense of smell they are 24 hour a day furry burglar alarms. Just don't make the mistake one high powered woman did in California. She'd been raped once and, determined to stop it happening again, purchased two attack trained German Shepherds. The next time the bad guys came the dogs were outside locked in the cages she'd bought for them.

Inside the house itself, our next layer if you will, where are you sleeping? Away from the main door to buy time or on the ground floor next to a big window? Many millionaires now are having safe rooms built into their mansions. These are heavily fortified rooms designed to withstand serious assault and come complete with their own air and food supply, communication links to the outside world, panic alarms and so on. You can make your own for a lot less than a millionaire will pay. Is there a room that has no direct access to outside? Can you put a heavy locking door on it and put some extra locks on the door? Is your cell phone in that room? Are there any weapons in there? No good owning a firearm for home defense if it's in the gun safe downstairs and you're upstairs in your improvised safe room. Consider putting some protein bars in there with some bottles of water, blankets, a first aid kit and a fire extinguisher and, perhaps most importantly, a flashlight.

Ok, we've tried to deter them before they even get near the house and detect them if they do...the last line of defense is to defeat them if it becomes necessary. Remember, if your safe room is good, the safer course of action is to hunker down and await the arrival of the police. If, for whatever reason though, you do need to go out and confront the bad guys you must have a plan. Perhaps most important is what are your arcs of fire. The interior walls of most homes in America are sheetrock which will not stop bullets. If you fire and miss and your round goes through the wall behind him, who's it going to hit? Your family members or your neighbors? Remember, rounds can and do travel a long way. A woman was hit years ago in the UK by a round from a military rifle range just over three miles away!!

Many people have been told the shotgun is the ultimate for home defense but is it? To begin with you need two hands to hold it so how easy is it going to be to hold an intruder at gun point while you dial the police with the other hand? What about navigating through the house with a shotgun? Unless you're highly trained and know the tricks of SWAT and HRU teams the first thing round the corner is going to be the barrel of your weapon which the bad guy can easily grab. Then there's the kick of that weapon if you do need to discharge it and it can make big men flinch. Another fallacy is that you don't have to aim. While it's true that there is some spread to the multiple projectiles coming out of a barrel, that generally doesn't happen till the round has traveled some distance, typically a longer distance than inside the average home.

A better bet in my opinion is a handgun. It's lighter if you have to hold an intruder at gun point for a long time, it's less intimidating to fire and it's strategically easier to maneuver through the house with one held close to the body. Husbands and wives can both use one if necessary and holding it with one hand while dialing emergency services with the other is relatively easy. Just don't buy one and stick it in the drawer next to the bed assuming it will save you when the time comes. You have to practice with it, and you have to ask yourself how good you'll be with it if you've just come out of a deep sleep after a few drinks to the noise of a gang running through the house heading for the bedroom.

Home Security Checklist

- Are you aware of the crime statistics of your neighborhood and sub-division?
- Do you have a neighborhood watch? Are you concerned enough to be part of it?
- Do you know your neighbors?
- Do you have motion detector lights around the house?
- Have you trimmed back any shrubbery that a criminal could hide in?
- Are your locks good quality?
- Do you have a peep-hole?
- Do you have deadbolts and do you use them?
- Do you have an alarm system?
- Do you have several panels with panic buttons on strategically located in the house?
- Do you have a dog? Does he live inside? (2 points) Outside (1 point)
- Do you have a list of emergency numbers programmed in your phone?
- Do you have the same list in the safe room?
- Do you have a safe room?
- Do you have it properly stocked?
- Do you know where your nearest hospital is?
- Do you know where the nearest police station is?
- Have you looked at your house as a criminal would and figured out the weaknesses?
- Do you have a good fence?
- Are your doors solid?

- Do you have smoke detectors?
- Do you have carbon monoxide detectors?
- Does your home look lived in when you're away on vacation/business?
- Have you bought timers to turn the lights on and off to create the illusion of occupancy?
- Is your garage as secure as the other entry points?
- Is the attic alarmed?
- Do you make sure your tools are locked away so criminals don't have access to them?
- Do you have a good first aid kit?
- Do you know how to use your first aid kit? Have you checked the contents lately?
- Have you practiced a fire drill for your house with your kids? (they do it at school)
- Have you practiced gathering up the family members and getting to the safe room?
- Do you have a rendezvous point outside in the event of a house fire?
- Do you have an alternate rendezvous point outside the neighborhood in the event of a natural disaster?

There are 33 questions here. If you miss more than ten you need to seriously evaluate your security preparedness. You wouldn't cancel your homeowners insurance and just hope nothing ever happened to it. You wouldn't cancel your health insurance and just hope you never get sick. For those same reasons hope shouldn't be part of your defensive plan for you, and your family's security.