

How to Make Your Home More Secure

By Charles Hansen

Whether you live in the city or the country, the days when you could confidently leave your door unlocked for your neighbors to drop in or your property unmonitored and unlit at night seem to be over (or at least on an extended vacation). Even if you're not particularly worried about being vandalized, burglarized or otherwise violated, a security system provides, in addition to genuine security, a sense of security which, like insurance, plays a large role in deciding whether or not and what type of security system you buy. It's all about how much of a system you feel you need for your own piece of mind.

The simplest kind of security is basically preventative raising the stakes for whoever might want to harm you or your property to the point where they'll move on to a more vulnerable location. A trip to your local home store will present you with hundreds of different do-it-yourself options but, first, do yourself a favor and do a serious inventory of your home's current level of security by thinking like a criminal. Starting inside the house, check out all the windows, doors and other means of ingress and imagine you're someone contemplating getting in. How easy would it be? Do your windows have simple, single locks that, if the glass is cut or broken, could open with a quick turn? Do they lock automatically when closed or could you forget to turn them and leave your home vulnerable? Does your door have a deadbolt, or simply a lock on the knob? Is the doorframe reinforced in some way (you would be surprised how easy it is simply kick open a door.)? Don't forget openings like fixed bathroom windows or those that seem too high for someone to reach. That second story bathroom or hall window that you leave open for ventilation because it doesn't seem easy to access will be exactly the place someone chooses to enter your home. Also, don't forget the garage and basement, exterior garage and basement windows and doors are often the most vulnerable, and often left open or unlocked. Finally, while you're doing this security check, check out your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, electrical sockets and other places where non-human hazards might also threaten your home and family.

Once you've identified vulnerable areas from inside your home, take a look at the outside – preferably at night. Contemplate your house just like a criminal would. That patio slider that you leave open partway to let in the air, is there something that keeps it from opening all the way? Do you always remember to lock your door when you're in the home? Where are places that someone can hide, out of view from both the house and the street, particularly near windows and doors? Is your home adequately lit at night and how easy is that lighting to disable? When you've accomplished this inventory, take a trip to the home store or call the locksmith and get safety locks and stops for doors and windows, deadbolts with key locks for all exterior doors, metal

reinforcements for doorframes, and, if necessary, cages or bars to protect basement windows and other particularly vulnerable openings. Even a new storm door or windows, if you don't have them, can add an extra level of work for a potential burglar and make your house "not worth it." Next work on the exterior lighting. Perhaps the most effective are spotlights with motion sensors that detect someone entering your property line and brightly illuminate large areas. If your backyard is always dark, you may want a photo sensitive light that illuminates it all night long.

If the above solutions still aren't enough to make you feel secure, contact your local security company or consultant. They'll not only analyze your vulnerability, but for a few thousand dollars and a monthly fee, can install a system which not only includes interior and exterior motion sensors and alarms, but a direct "panic" line to the security company and local authorities for crime, fire and medical emergencies. Since there's a great deal of variation in the quality of these systems and their response, make sure to check them out with the Better Business Bureau, as well as asking for references.

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