

15 SECURITY PRECAUTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO FORTIFY YOUR HOME AND HELP PREVENT HOME INVASIONS AND BURGLARIES



According to FBI statistics, a burglar strikes every 30 seconds in the U.S., with almost 29% of them occurring with someone in the home. However, criminology reports do not yet take into account the most unique year in recent human history. Due to widespread lockdowns, quarantines, and voluntary isolation, the risk of coming face to face with a home invader has never been higher. As potential commercial targets equip themselves with alarms, protective film and video surveillance, bad actors will inevitably turn to larger homes where they perceive less formidable defenses and a bigger pay day. This shift in targets becomes more alarming when combined with an already established 10% increase in burglaries that occurs every summer. Most families are counting down the days to travel this time of year. The summer of 2021 holds great potential for escape from the confines of home as vaccinations become more prevalent and travel becomes safer. Consequently, numerous experts anticipate an even larger increase in burglaries, which may result in home invasions as individuals continue to work from home.

If the past 12 months have taught us anything, we should be prepared for worst case scenarios, especially when it involves the safety of our family and home. According to security expert, Paul V. Viollis of Viollis Group International, "Safeguarding your home is all about protecting the human asset which is why ensuring it is done efficiently is paramount. Remember, cheap is expensive so don't gamble with your physical well-being."

Being aware of the risks of a potential home invasion by taking simple security precautions can make the difference between the criminal choosing your home or another. The best way to prevent a home invasion is to think like a criminal and audit potential vulnerabilities. By adding layers of security to your home, it will make your property less attractive to criminals and drastically reduce your chances of becoming a victim of a burglary or home invasion. Consider these 15 security precautions to fortifying your residence and protecting your family:

- 1. Doors:** It is estimated 34% of all criminals enter a home through the front door. Ensure all exterior doors are solid core and consider reinforcing your door frames and hinges by installing dead bolts, three-inch screws in door jambs, and dowel rods in the track of sliding doors. In addition, upgrade the locks on your exterior doors with high security locks, which can go a long way in keeping criminals out of the house. Install a wide-angle peephole and cover when not in use as there are devices that allow a reverse view. Remember to lock the door from house to garage as it is an easy target for intruders.
- 2. Windows:** For those who don't live in coastal counties with wind impact resistant windows, consider adding protective films to all first floor windows, which can significantly slow down a criminals' entry into the property. Update window locks, add window stops to double hung windows and make sure they are always secured unless in use.
- 3. Landscaping:** Trim trees and shrubs so they do not become a hiding place for burglars to lurk while they work on entering the property. If the yard is untended, it is a signal to bad actors that the homeowners are away. Planting thorny bushes near windows are helpful in keeping would-be intruders away.
- 4. Fences:** Think of a fence as an added layer of security. While burglars are plotting their escape plan, the fence is an additional hurdle to consider. Cement bases add stability and ideally use open metal or chain link, as solid walls can provide an easier foothold and another place to hide.

5. **Outdoor Lighting:** Install outdoor, high intensity LED motion lighting on all sides of the home. While it may not deter criminals from entering your home, it will startle them and help security cameras get a better view.
6. **Security System:** Many families opt to skip a centrally-monitored alarm as they believe the nuisance of false alarms outweigh the benefits. Burglars who are looking for a crime of convenience would rather skip an alarmed home for a home that is an easier target. Some DIY systems, likely SimpliSafe, offer easy and affordable options that often pay for themselves when the homeowner policy discounts are applied and provide peace of mind in the event of a fire. Visible signage of the alarm system in the yard is crucial. Consider installing an alarm pad in the master bedroom in the event you need access to a panic button or alarm controls. Add exterior motion sensor cameras that are recorded and monitor. Conceal exterior wires in electrical conduits to make it difficult for criminals to find and disable security system. As an extra security measure, keep the doors locked and alarm set during the day while you are home.
7. **Home Safes:** Consider installing two safes in your home. If you are the victim of a home invasion and are ordered to open the safe, use the decoy safe with possessions that are replaceable and keep sentimental heirlooms and valuables in another safe in another location. Keep in mind, burglars expect a safe in the master bedroom so consider a less likely location. Bolt the safe down to the floor so it is not easily transported.
8. **Travel:** With light at the end of our COVID quarantines, it is safe to say travel is in most families' future. Make sure you wait to share your travels with the world until after you return home. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can wait! Ensure your yard is kept up, alert your neighbors, have mail brought in and lights on to avoid alerting would-be prowlers of your absence. Consider employing a TV simulator that produces high-intensity light and color changes, similar to a television to fool those passing by that someone is home.
9. **Safe Room:** No longer considered a luxury for the ultra-affluent, consider retrofitting a room or closet to help shield your family in natural disasters and home invasions. Ensure your safe room is equipped with a security door with a dead bolt, peephole, reinforced walls, floors and ceiling, extra cell phone, power outlets, cell phone chargers, first aid kits, emergency lighting, water, food, and self-defense equipment.
10. **Educate the Family:** Educate all members of the family, starting at a young age, of what to do in the event of an emergency. Discuss the concept of "run, hide, fight" and determine a meeting point in the event of an escape. With younger children, our family watched "Home Alone" and used it as a point of reference for our family plan. Ensure everyone is familiar with how to operate the security system, using the panic button, including signaling the police without an interior alarm, and how to deal with strangers who enter the property.
11. **Contractors and Vendors:** When we invite unknown people into our home to do work, we often do not have the full picture of their background, intentions or friends. Consider utilizing vendors that do full background checks, work with employees with tenure or consider doing a background check yourself. Work with your insurance advisor to coordinate these activities, as many high-net-worth insurers afford discounted or complimentary background checks for contractors and domestic staff. Don't open the door if you are not expecting a delivery or technician. Don't be shy to ask their name and employer and call the company to verify identity. While vendors are inside the home, someone should supervise the work, keep workers confined to areas where work is performed, limit the amount of jewelry you are wearing and keep valuable papers out of sight.

12. **Beware of Strangers:** Home intruders will often pose as delivery workers, maintenance workers or police officers to earn your trust to gain access to the residence. Others claim an accident occurred nearby, a car broke down or use children as a distraction. As soon as the door is opened, they will use brute force, guns, or threats to take control of the situation and enter the home. While some criminals enter the home looking for valuables and cash, others force victims to drive them to a bank to withdraw cash.
13. **Build a Community:** Neighborhoods that have a strong sense of community and help others rebuild after a disaster rebound significantly faster than those without. The same holds true for preventing burglaries and crime in your neighborhood. Get to know your neighbors and consider starting / joining a neighborhood watch program.
14. **Employ Security Habits:** Create a habit of locking all windows and doors when you leave the property, be on the lookout for suspicious people in your neighborhood and check on neighbors regularly, don't enter the home if you suspect there was a break-in as the intruder may still be in the home, keep garage door closed, break down boxes of expensive purchases to avoid telling the world about what is inside and keep your cell phone and car keys near the bed. Use your cell phone to call police and use the panic button on car keys to scare off the intruder. And, it turns out man's best friend is an excellent intruder deterrent.
15. **Insurance:** Having the right insurance will help mitigate the impact if you and your family are victims of a home invasion or burglary. Consider adding a collections policy for valuables, such as jewelry, silver, wine, coins, and art, as the homeowner policy typically has limited coverage for these valuable possessions. Create a home inventory to easily identify your possessions in the event of a burglary.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BURGLARY AND HOME INVASION

While the definitions vary from state to state, the main difference of a burglary and home invasion is coming face to face with a criminal in your home.

Burglary: illegal entry into a building or home with intent to commit a crime, such as theft.

Home Invasion: unlawful forceable entry into a building or home while you or your family are inside the residence.



Sources

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