

Residential Security Precautions at Mallard Bay

January, 2008

Even in Mallard Bay, we've been targeted for burglary. One recent attempt, although amateurish and unsuccessful, did point up the fact that even here, where we routinely leave homes unlocked and keys in the ignition, we must bear in mind that crime does exist.

This pamphlet has been prepared to give each of us food for thought. For some, its recommendations might be obvious. Others might take its contents as unnecessarily cautious. The intent is to present a broad overview of practical, affordable personal measures each of us can take to feel more secure in our homes.

Burglary Facts

In about fifty percent of all burglaries, access is gained through unlocked doors and windows. No force is necessary. Garage windows and doors seem to be a favorite target for entrance. Burglars don't want to be seen entering the house, so will usually pick a side or back entrance for their attempt. Forget lock picks. If a burglar can't walk right in through an unlocked door or window, he will try to force it open. If a burglar can't gain entrance to the house within five or ten minutes, he usually gives up the attempt. Once inside, on average, a burglar spends eight to twelve minutes in the house. He wants to get in and out quickly. The master bedroom is usually the prime target area. Burglars are most often after cash, jewelry, electronic equipment, silver and firearms.

Burglars are usually unarmed, don't want a confrontation (therefore preferring to hit an unoccupied house), and don't want to attract attention. That's why they like to make as little noise as possible and don't want to do anything outside the house that would make anyone suspicious.

Hardware

When we think of measures to protect ourselves from burglary, we usually turn to hardware. It can range from the dirt-cheap to the astronomically expensive. Fortunately for us, the basic hardware precautions should be sufficient to deter the level of threat we currently see. The categories we'll cover include: exterior doors, locks, alarms, lighting and grillwork (although current conditions don't call for anything that drastic). Realizing that no amount of hardware will forever stave off a persistent attempt to penetrate your home, the main goal will be to make your house difficult enough to hit to make the burglar move to an easier target.

Doors

Exterior doors should be sturdy. Doors manufactured of solid wood or metal are good. Hollow doors or those with large expanses of single pane glass are not as good.

Installing a stout lock on a sub-standard door is a bit like installing a jet engine on a Yugo. It doesn't make a lot of sense. Sliding glass doors are adequate, but should have double panes and be equipped with supplementary locks in addition to those provided by the manufacturer.

Locks

Springlatch Lock

This type lock should not be used as the only locking mechanism on an outside door. It is characterized by a latch that engages a plate (strike) in the doorframe when the door is closed. It keeps the door from opening in a stiff breeze and the knob cannot be turned easily when the locking mechanism is engaged. It can, however, be easily forced open. This lock, if used on an outside door, should be used in conjunction with at least one additional deadlock (see below). For outside use, this lock typically unlocks with a key on the exterior and a button or butterfly turn on the inside.



Deadlock

This type lock is for installation on substantial outside doors. It's not very useful on a flimsy one. It generally resists forced entry quite well. Some are designed to be opened with keys and other more recent ones are designed with push button keypads that allow the lock to open when the correct combination code is entered. A deadlock contains a "deadbolt", a solid piece of metal that, when engaged, protrudes from the door into a cavity in the doorframe. To be effective against forced entry, the deadbolt must penetrate at least one inch.

Deadlocks come in two basic styles:

Single Cylinder – On this type lock, there is a keyway or keypad on the outside and a mechanism such as a butterfly lever on the inside for engaging or disengaging the deadbolt from the inside without a key. This lock should only be installed on doors where the lock will be at least 36 inches from the nearest window or other glass covered opening, thus preventing a burglar from breaking the window and reaching inside to disengage the lock.



Double Cylinder – This lock looks similar to the single cylinder, but has a keyway on **both** the outside and the inside. It is intended for installation on doors where the lock will be closer than 36 inches from a window or other glass opening. The idea is that once the lock is locked, the key will be removed and even if the burglar does reach inside the house, he'll have nothing to turn to open the lock. The problem, of course, comes when the house's occupant wants to open the lock to exit the house – such as in a fire. It is extremely important that with this type of lock a storage place for the key be designated far enough away from a window to preclude its use by a burglar, but close enough to the door to allow all home occupants (including children and people in wheelchairs) to use it in an emergency. Typically the key is kept on a nearby nail and the location is known to all who occupy the home.



Sliding Glass Doors and Windows

These are particularly vulnerable. For starters, they're usually located on the backs or sides of homes – areas offering a degree of concealment for a burglar. Secondly, the locking hardware with which they're equipped at the factory is frequently easy to circumvent or force open. Furthermore, the nature of design of some older sliding doors and windows makes them easy to lift out of their tracks, even when the manufacturer's lock is engaged. One way of solving this particular problem is for the homeowner to install screws inside the top track to prevent the door being lifted far enough to allow removal from the bottom track.

The locks on sliding doors and windows can be augmented with floor level, commercially available deadbolts specifically designed for the purpose or with installation of a commercially available "Charlie Bar" which, when engaged on the inside of the door prevents it from sliding open. Alternatively, a 1-inch diameter dowel rod cut to size and dropped in the bottom track will do the trick.

Location of Door Keys

Locks don't do you much good if burglars can have access to their keys. Each house occupant should have a set, and a neighbor who agrees to watch your house in your absence should have one. If you do have other duplicates made, insure you've approved it and keep track of to whom each has been given. Treat keys as the sensitive items they are. Resist the temptation to keep keys in any lock. You might as well save the expense of a lock at all if you're going to do this. Also, don't keep keys "hidden" outside in phony rocks or under the doormat. Burglars go to movies too.

Locking Procedures

Although it might seem like overkill in Mallard Bay, it's a good idea to lock doors and windows, even when someone is at home. In any event, you should certainly lock up when you leave the house vacant and at night.

Alarm Systems

Alarms serve two primary purposes: They warn the family or whomever is monitoring the alarm system that there is an intruder, and, when set off, they can have the effect of frightening the burglar away.

Some systems sound an audible alarm that can be heard only at the house while other alert a contract alarm company over telephone lines. When the company receives an alarm, they will call the house to attempt to determine if the alarm is legitimate, then, as appropriate, they will call the local law enforcement authority to dispatch assistance.

The control panels for alarm systems are installed in the home, usually in an out-of-the-way place such as a closet. The house occupant knows codes by which the system can be activated or deactivated. One major failing of alarm systems is that users often do not activate them when they should, such as at night or when leaving the house.

The systems can come with a variety of sensors including magnetic switches to indicate when a door or window is opened, area sensors to detect motion in a room, panic alarms to be activated in the event of an attack in the house, fire sensors and smoke sensors.

In addition to sensors, an alarm system can have a variety of ways of alerting people to a problem including siren horns located inside or outside the home, flashing lights, and automatic telephone dialers for alerting the alarm monitoring company.

Your response to an intrusion alarm might be to gather the family into your pre-determined safehaven and call 911 and report a break-in.

Like any other piece of technology, alarm systems must be maintained. For the user, this is usually limited to testing transmitters for proper functioning and checking batteries.

Lighting

Elaborate lighting schemes are generally not necessary to provide a deterrent to burglary. Realizing that burglars do not like to be seen at work, however, it's a good idea to leave porch lights on at night, turn on some interior lights and a radio when away from the house at night, and install motion detectors to turn on outside lights at night when a person approaches the house. Keep flashlights with fresh batteries throughout the house and check exterior lighting regularly for burned out bulbs.

Safehaven

This is simply a place to hide when intruders are in your home. If you feel threatened at all during a break-in, this is the place to go with your family to lock yourself in and wait for help to arrive. Usually, the master bedroom suite is selected for the safehaven because it already comes equipped with necessary items.

These include solid wood or metal door with deadbolts, means of emergency escape (windows), wired telephone, cell phone and charger, telephone directory, emergency numbers, bathroom, flashlight, candles, AM/FM radio, fire extinguisher, first aid kit and miscellaneous tools.

Whether or not you chose to lock yourself in a safehaven, if you're at home during a burglary, you should not attempt to stop or detain a burglar. The risk of injury is not worth the effort. You should call 911 and request immediate police assistance. Circumstances might make it prudent for you to make noise in an attempt to scare the burglar away.

Burglary Deterrence

Once you are satisfied the hardware you have installed serves as a partial deterrence to burglary, here are a few additional things you can do to make it more difficult for a burglar to victimize you.

Don't allow a potential burglar to observe your movements in the house by strategic arrangement of blinds and drapes.

Reduce a burglar's available places to hide by keeping foliage away from windows and entrances.

Develop a rapport with your neighbors. Ask them to keep an eye on your house when you're away and do the same for them. When away, arrange with a neighbor to pick up newspapers and mail or other delivery daily. Also ask them to check the perimeter of the house regularly and report any signs of attempted or actual intrusion to the police.

A dog is a great idea. It is the most reliable, inexpensive and effective alarm system you can own. Even a small dog's bark can drive an intruder away and alert family members. On the other hand, a dog can be overcome with poison and that little doggie door you've installed in the wall can be used by small intruders to access your house.

Planning

Planning is essential to your security of your family in dealing with an intrusion you're your home. Encourage your spouse and children to come up with scenarios and how they would deal with them. Teach them how to close and lock the safehaven door and practice drills with all.

If your safehaven is outside the house, insure all know where it is and under which circumstances they should go there.

Valuables

Don't leave money, jewelry, or other small high value items lying about the house, especially when workmen are on the premises. Record serial numbers and take photos of all valuable items or mark with an identifier you will recognize. When you're away, secure valuables such as jewelry or important papers in a home safe or safe deposit box.

Visitors to Your Home

Bear in mind that sophisticated thieves might attempt to determine information about you, your home and your belongings while planning to burglarize you later. Keeping that in mind, use a door viewer before opening the door. Don't open doors to strangers, but speak to them through the door. Ask to see credentials if they claim to be police or maintenance personnel and do not schedule or allow any workmen to be in the house while you are absent.

While You Are Away

Mallard Bay has many houses that are occupied only part-time, making them attractive targets for burglary. If you plan to be away from home more than 24 hours, ask a neighbor to keep an eye on your house and take the following actions.

- Close and lock all windows and doors.
- Place inside and outside lights on timers to turn on at various times during the night.
- Check outside lighting and replace older bulbs.
- Activate the intrusion alarm system.
- Unplug unnecessary appliances.
- Arrange for your lawn to be mowed regularly while you are gone.
- Stop home delivery of newspapers and mail or ask neighbor to take in.
- Set some interior lamps on automatic on/off timers, to turn on at dusk and off at the time you normally turn off your lights.
- Turn off ringers on home telephones.
- Ensure all personal and home insurance policies are up-to-date and that coverage is adequate.