

Burglary Prevention

Barriers to Burglary

Burglary is a crime of opportunity. Make their work risky and difficult, and you stand a good chance of stopping them before they get in.

Your first line of defense

To a burglar visibility means vulnerability. They hide behind fences and shrubbery. The key is to keep trespassers out while keeping your property visible. Use picket or chain link fences. Keep hedges clipped down around waist level.

On the outside looking in

Burglars try the doors and windows first. If burglars have difficulty here, chances are they will move on to another property.

Doors

- **Locks.** The strongest are *deadbolt locks* with a minimum 1" throw bolt containing a hardened, saw-resistant steel insert. Attach the strike plate to the door frame with 4" screws. The *double cylinder deadbolt lock* requires a key from both sides, preventing a burglar from breaking glass in the door and turning the knob from the inside. Make sure the cylinder of the lock has a steel guard — a ring around the key section. The cylinder guard should be tapered, or it should rotate around the key section to prevent wrenching.

Remember, though, a double cylinder dead-bolt can also block your exit in an emergency. Check with your local law enforcement agency or building inspector to see if these locks are permitted in your area.

- **Hinges.** Doors that swing out have hinges on the outside. A burglar can easily remove the hinge pins and lift the door out. To foil this, remove the center screw from each side of the hinge and insert a metal pin or headless screw on one side. When the door is closed, the end of the pin will fit into the opposite hole. Thus, even if the pins are removed, the door will remain bolted to the frame.
- **Padlocks.** Overhead doors, receiving doors, garage doors — all are typically secured with padlocks and hasps. Look for sturdy padlocks that don't release the key until the padlock is closed. The padlock should be case-hardened with a 3/8" shackle to resist repeated smashing. Remember, a padlock is only as good as the hasps on which it is mounted; so bolt hasps securely to a metal plate, and make sure the bolts are concealed when the padlock is closed.
- **Door construction.** Burglars can kick in a weak door. Replace hollow core doors with solid core doors, or strengthen the existing ones with metal sheets. Replace weak door frames, or reinforce them with steel or concrete. Protect glass in the door with steel bars or mesh; or place a polycarbonate sheet over the glass on the inside.

Windows

Protect windows by putting grates, grill work, or bars over them; or cover the glass on the inside with a clear polycarbonate sheet. The sheet should extend 1-1/2" beyond the perimeter of the glass and be bolted to the door. Space the bolts approximately every 3 inches. Unbreakable safety glass is also available, but it is more expensive.

Other entrances

Skylights, ventilation ducts, and fire escapes tempt burglars because these openings usually are not visible from the street. Protect skylights and ducts with metal grates and iron bars. The first stair of a fire escape should be too high for the average adult to reach from the ground. The door or window leading to

the escape should be equipped with emergency exit features: window guards should be removable or hinged to allow for an emergency exit. Keys to locked windows or door should be kept nearby.

Key control. Because any lock gives way to a key, practice good key control.

- Label keys with a code indicating back door, receiving door, display case, etc.
- Engrave "Do Not Duplicate" on all keys.
- Restrict key-access to your most trusted employees; maintain a log to record removal and return.
- Consider having locks re-keyed when an employee leaves your business.

Guards

Join neighboring businesses to hire a uniformed guard from a reputable security company. Check references. The security staff should be familiar with your employees, your store hours and your shoplifting/internal theft policies.

Lighting

Light is a great crime deterrent. In fact, some states have minimum standards for exterior lighting. Light up all dark areas, especially doors and windows. If your business is in a poorly lit commercial area, join with other merchants to petition local government for more lights or pool funds and underwrite the cost yourselves.

Alarms

Before you invest in an alarm system, weigh the cost against your need. How valuable is your merchandise? How great is your risk? After installing an alarm, let burglars know by putting warning signs in windows and entrances.

Every alarm system should include:

- a fail-safe battery backup
- fire-sensing capability
- a feedback device to check the system

For an expert appraisal of your security needs, ask for a premise security survey by your local law enforcement agency, or check with a reputable security consultant.

Remember

Locks and alarms can't prevent a burglary unless they're in use. Establish a routine for "closing up shop," locking doors and windows, setting up alarms.

If a burglar breaks in

Your best protection against an intruder is visibility: Well-lit open spaces, low counters, and large, uncluttered display windows — these precautions keep the burglar in the spotlight. Put your safe and cash register up front so that the burglar's activity will be visible from the outside. Empty your cash drawers and leave them open so a burglar won't be tempted to break them open. Anchor safes in concrete, and make sure they have combination locks. Put locks on all interior doors and hook them into your alarm system. (Always check fire regulations before installing such locks.)

If you suspect a burglary:

- **Don't go in** — the burglar may still be inside.
- **Don't open for business** — your employees and customers may unwittingly alter valuable evidence.
- **Call police immediately.**