

# SIMI VALLEY POLICE DEPARTMENT

## Crime Prevention Unit – Home Security



Don't "welcome" a burglar into your home. Most residential burglars devote little if any time to the advance planning of any specific break-in. Their crimes are, for the most part, crimes of opportunity. They pick what appears to be an easy mark. If their advance checking and closer examination reveal a greater risk than anticipated, they move onto a safer target. The more you can do to keep your home from looking like an easy target, the safer you are. There are also many steps that you can take to minimize your loss and improve your chances of recovery if a break-in does occur.

The first step in improving overall security is to take a hard look at the security measures already in use in your home. To help you with this task, the Simi Valley Police Department has developed a guide to evaluating your home security. The guide is based on the main parts of your home and includes:

- [Landscaping and Yard Security](#)
- [Exterior and Interior Lighting](#)
- [House and Garage Doors](#)
- [Locks, Strikes Plates and Hinges](#)
- [Sliding Glass Doors and Windows](#)
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### Landscaping and Yard Security

A few alterations to your landscaping can be enough to put off intruders. To avoid getting caught, intruders look for property they can get into and out of quickly. Their ideal target is a house surrounded by large hedges and shrubs, which hamper visibility from the street and neighbors' houses.

Trim shrubbery and trees so doors and windows are visible to neighbors and from the street. Trimmed landscaping should not provide concealment for criminals. If you have a second floor, prune trees so they can't help a thief climb in second floor windows. Place trellises where they can't be used as ladders to gain entry to the upper floors.

Ground plants (shrubbery and bushes) within four feet of any sidewalks, driveways, doors or gates, should be maintained at a height of not more than two feet.

Ground plants between four and eight feet of any sidewalks, driveways, doors, or gates, should be maintained at a height of not more than four feet.

Ground plants under windows should be maintained at a height that is below the windowsill.

Trees should be trimmed so that the lower branches are more than six feet off the ground.

Place large gauge gravel on the ground near windows. The noise caused by intruders walking on it can become a psychological deterrent. DO NOT place river rocks or other items near glass windows or doors. You do not want to provide the burglar with tools!

Plant spiny (thorny) plants along fences and under windows. Such plants will discourage even the most nimble intruder. Protecting with spiny plants is as effective as the use of barbed wire, and a lot more attractive.

### **Street Numbers**

Street numbers should be easily visible from the street. Critical time can be saved by emergency responders when the street address for the house is visible from a distance.

On your house:

- Use numbers made of reflective materials, or black on white, that are six inches high.
- Keep numbers new and clean and replace when necessary.
- The numbers should be placed under a light and near the front door or garage entrance.

Your house number should be painted on the curb in front of your driveway:

- Four to six inch high black numbers on a white background are most effective.
- Numbers should be centered at the end of your driveway or just to the house side of your driveway.
- If you live along an alley, your house number should be painted (as stated above) on the fence outside your alley gate.

### **Limited or Direct Access to Yards and Store Rooms**

- Intruders look for no or few obstacles blocking quick exits. Fences prevent burglars from carrying away large items if the gates are locked. Gates should be locked at all times, even when you are home!
- Ladders and tools should be stored in a garage or storage shed, and these areas should be locked.
- Landscaping should also be designed to control access to your property. Proper barriers make the person with criminal intent feel uncomfortable as he or she approaches your home or business

### **Exterior and Interior Lighting**

It is a known fact that good lighting is a deterrent to crime. While any lighting will help reduce your risk of becoming of a victim, the proper lights, used correctly, will be the most effective deterrent to criminal activity.

**Exterior:**

- Exterior lights are important, especially near doors and in the rear of the house where intruders do most of their work.
- All sides of your home should be protected by security lighting that is located high out of reach and is vandal resistant.
- Lighting in carports and garages is critical. For garages, an automatic garage door opener is the best choice. Almost every garage door opener made today has a light that comes on when the opener is activated, lighting the garage interior. In carports, it is best either to leave a light on, have a light on a timer, or have a light connected to a motion sensor or photoelectric cell.

- The best light to use on the exterior is a motion detector type of fixture. The advantage to this type of light, especially in the backyard, is that the light warns the resident that someone is in their yard. While there is a concern that dogs, cats, or birds will trigger the sensor and cause the lights to come on, if the resident sets the sensitivity of the sensor correctly this will not be a problem. In the front yard, any type of lighting will be effective, as long the lighting pattern covers the entire front and sides of the house. Sensor lighting will be effective, but is more prone to “false alarms” caused by things like people walking down the sidewalk or children playing.

### **Interior:**

- When residents go out for an evening, they usually leave on their “burglar beacon.” A burglar beacon is a small light that is left on so they don't walk into a dark house when they come home. These are lights like the one above the kitchen sink or stove, the hallway light, or a light in the corner of the living room. For the criminal, these lights are a signal that no one is home. If you go out for an evening leave several lights on and a radio. When you go on vacation put at least two lights, in different parts of the house, and a radio on timers. Contact the Simi Valley Police Department and sign up for a Vacation Watch. Regardless of whether you are on vacation, or just gone for the evening, from the outside your house should look as if someone is home.

### **House and Garage Doors**

Entry doors should be solid core wood (at least 1-3/4” thick) or metal wrapped. Your door should fit its frame tightly, with no more than 1/8” clearance between the door and the frame. If the gap is too big, replace the door or bolt a sturdy metal strip to the door edge. You will boost your protection and save energy too.

Most hollow core doors can be easily broken through. If the door is flimsy or weak, or doesn't fit securely into the frame, it offers little protection, no matter what locks you use.

Doors with decorative glass panels or windows are easy marks. It takes only seconds to break the glass and unlock the door. If you do not want to replace such doors, install a break resistant plastic panel, such as Lexan®, or decorative grille over the glass. Attach the grill with special non-removable screws.

For the best protection, install a wrought iron security door over your front door. Wrought iron doors not only provide an extra level of visible security against a break-in, they also allow you to open your front door to strangers, or leave the front door open for ventilation.

Your garage door should be securely locked at all times (even when you are home). Keeping it locked is just as important as keeping your home locked, especially if the garage is attached to the home. Once inside the garage, a burglar can work uninterrupted at getting into the house. Simi Valley Police Department statistics show that approximately 40% of our non-forced entry residential crime is through open garage doors.

If you install a “doggie door” be sure it is not a way in for burglars as well as the dog. Do not be complacent by the fact that you have a small dog. Burglars come in all sizes!

## **Locks, Keys, Strike Plates and Hinges**

### **Locks/Dead Bolts**

The “lock-in-knob” offers you privacy and convenience, but it does not offer security from intruders. In fact many “lock-in-knob” locks can be opened by using a simple credit card. You may have privacy, but you don't have security.

All exterior doors require the use of a dead bolt lock. When you turn the key, the locking mechanism slides a strong metal bolt from the door into the door's frame.

When you buy a dead bolt lock, **MAKE SURE:**

- The bolt extends at least 1” front edge of the door.
- The strike plate is attached through the trim to the doorframe with screws at least 3” long.
- It has a rotation case hardened shroud that prevents it from being twisted off with a pair of pliers or other tools.

The two most common types of dead bolts are:

- Single cylinder dead bolts have a thumb turn on the interior side. They are convenient to use and may speed up the exit process in the event of fire. If used near a window they can be opened by breaking the window and reaching through. This type of dead bolt lock does not prevent the burglar from taking your property out through the door.
- Double cylinder dead bolts utilize keys on both sides. This type of lock should be considered if there is glass window within 40” of the lock. However, this type of lock does present a potential fire escape hazard. This type of dead bolt lock can delay a burglar who wants to use the door to remove your property from your home.

### **Keys**

As many as half of all burglaries take place without forced entry. Many times the burglar uses a key. Be sure your keys don't fall into the wrong hands.

- Never carry identification on your key ring or holder.
- Re-key all locks when you move into a new house or apartment.
- Know who has keys to your home. Do not give keys to maintenance or delivery people. If you must leave a key behind, leave it with a trusted neighbor. Make sure that each member of your family knows where his or her key is.
- Never hide a key outside. Burglars know all the hiding places.
- Do not hang keys on hooks within plain view inside your home.

### **Strike Plate**

The strike plate is attached to the doorframe with screws. The metal bolt of the dead bolt lock slides into the strike plate to secure the door soundly to the doorframe. A high security strike plate is required to keep the metal bolt from being kicked from the doorframe when locked. A high security strike plate should have at least 4 screws that are a minimum of 3” long.

## **Hinges**

Hinges are often installed with the same 3/4" screws as the common strike plates. Replace these with 2" to 3" fully threaded screws so the hinges are anchored to the sub frame.

In some cases the hinges are installed in such a manner that the hinge pins are exposed to the exterior and an intruder may attempt to remove the pins in an effort to gain entry.

Hinges can be pinned by installing a partially threaded screw into the frame side of the hinge. The unthreaded portion of the screw is left exposed and the head of the screw is cut off. A corresponding hole is drilled into the door and hinge on the opposite side, so when the door is closed the exposed portion of the screw fits in to the door. This will prevent the door from being lifted out.

## **Sliding Glass Doors and Windows**

People often install sturdy locks on their front doors but leave sliding glass doors and sliding glass windows "wide open" to illegal entry. Burglars look for both of these because they are easy to open. Usually, arcadia doors and windows are more secluded than a front door, making a perfect place for burglars to hide and enter. Two factors that must be protected against are:

### **Prying the Lock**

Most sliding glass doors and sliding windows come equipped with a lock that is easily pried open. A supplemental lock must be installed.

Broomsticks (they should fit snug) and finger operated locks provide some protection.

Key locking devices are much preferred because they can prevent the burglar from using the door or window to remove stolen property.

There are several types of supplemental locks available. Keyed locks may be keyed alike with other entry locksets and dead bolts. Check with your locksmith or hardware store and select a sturdy type that most suits your home.

### **Lifting Out**

Many sliding glass doors and sliding windows can be lifted out of their tracks from the outside.

Two sheet metal screws placed in the track above the removable part of the door or window can prevent it from being removed. Adjust the screws so that the doors or window will just clear underneath them.

Drill a hole and insert a nail through the inside frame and part way through the metal doorframe. You can remove the nail but the burglar can't.

## **Double Hung Windows**

To secure a double hung window, drill a downward sloping hole into the top of the bottom window and through that into the bottom of the top window. A pin can now be inserted, locking the window shut.

By partly opening the window (less than 4 inches) and making a second set of holes, the window can then be used for ventilation. Remember, open windows and doors, even if secured, should never be left unattended while you are gone or asleep.

## **Security Alarms**

Do you keep extremely valuable property (jewelry, television sets, computers, other electronic equipment, etc.) in your house? Do you often leave your house unattended for more than a few hours (to go to work or school for example), or do you just want more protection? These are reasons to invest in a quality alarm system.

Many quality alarm systems are available. Before you purchase a security system, you should have in mind what kind of system you want. This will prevent buying more equipment than you actually need. Read as much about different brands and types of systems as you can. Talk to friends and neighbors who have alarm systems. We recommend that you speak to at least three security alarm companies about their product and service prior to purchasing any alarm system. Remember, you get what you pay for in many cases.

## **Choosing Your System**

Common questions asked by people considering an alarm system:

- How do I know the right company to choose when considering the purchase of an alarm system?
- How much protection do I need?
- How much should I expect to pay

Tips to help with choosing an alarm company:

- Ask about insurance: general liability, workers' compensation, and errors and omissions. You have every right to ask for certificates of insurance for these items. This protects you, because if the company is not properly protected, the claim or loss falls on you!
- Ask for the company's city business license, which allows them to do business in your community.
- Ask for local referrals of other customers in your area who have had systems installed like the one being proposed to you.
- Check your contract! Review carefully what you sign, and make sure everything is agreed upon in writing. Know what the warranty period is and what is included in the warranty. Remember, an adequate design should consider the structure, the lifestyle, the perceived needs, and the budget of the occupant.
- Ask if it is going to be monitored locally or outside of the State of California.

The Simi Valley Police Department does not prefer one alarm company over another, nor do we recommend companies, brands, or types of security devices of any kind.

To reduce the number of false alarms (98.5% of alarm calls in Simi Valley are false) that Police Officers must respond to, the City has an Alarm Ordinance. For additional information, please contact the Police Department's Alarm Coordinator at (805) 583-6950.

## **Other Home Security Information**

### **Home Inventory List**

Keep a “Personal Property Inventory List” in a safe place, possibly with your insurance papers. This helps to recover stolen property in the event of a theft or burglary. Keep a duplicate copy in a safe deposit box or other safe place.

The more complete your inventory list, the better. In case of loss by causes other than theft it may help you establish your loss with your insurance company. As an example, if you have a fire in your residence and lose a couch, an end table, and a portion of your carpet, the accurate listing of when and how much you paid for the items will assist you in establishing your loss.

On the inventory list indicate the room in which the property is located. Make the description of the item as complete as possible. Include the manufacturer model number, size, color, and the material the item is made of. This list might include damage marks, repairs, etc. Make sure to list the manufacturer’s serial number on the list. Do not confuse the model number with the serial number.

If you mark your property with a personal number, use your driver’s license number, not your social security number. To aid in marking your valuables, the Simi Valley Police Department has a program called Operation Identification that allows citizens of Simi Valley to borrow an engraver from the Police Department.

### **Personal Safety Tips**

- Always be observant of your surroundings.
- If you live alone don’t use your marital status or first name on your telephone listing or on your mailbox.
- Get to know your neighbors.
- When returning home, or to your car, have your keys in your hand so that you can let yourself in without delay.
- If you think you’re being followed, don’t go home! Go to an open business. If you are still being followed call the police from there.
- Park your car in well-lighted areas. Lock the doors and take the keys.
- If you think a prowler is threatening, take no direct action yourself – dial 911 immediately.

### **Do’s and Don’ts of Personal Safety**

Do’s:

- Use the security devices you have.
- Leave lights on inside and out when you go out for the evening.
- Have the police and fire department telephone numbers near your telephone.
- Carry only what is absolutely necessary in your purse.
- Check with the manager before letting repairmen in your apartment.
- Close your drapes in the evening hours.

- Be suspicious of people loitering around your house, apartment complex, or the parking lot.
- Call the police if you see anything suspicious.

Don'ts:

- Don't keep large sums of money in your home.
- Don't carry large sums of money while you are out.
- Don't let strangers in to "use your telephone."
- Don't undress in front of open windows.
- Don't leave notes on your door.
- Don't hide a key (leave one with a trusted neighbor).
- Don't display expensive equipment or items in plain view through your window.
- Don't use your name or telephone number on your answering machine message. Use a generic message that does not state you are not home.
- Don't answer personal questions on telephone surveys.
- Don't admit "service reps" from utilities unless you have an appointment or can verify their authenticity.

### What is Suspicious?

Suspicious Persons:

- *Going door to door in a residential area* - especially suspicious if, after a few houses are visited, one or more of the subjects goes into a back or side yard. More suspicious if another remains in the front when this occurs. Possible significance: "casing" for a house to burglarize, burglary in progress, soliciting violation, or a trespass.
- *Waiting in front of a house or business* - particularly suspicious if owners are absent or, if it's a business, and the establishment is closed. Possible significance: Lookout for a burglary in progress inside.
- *Forcing entrance to or tampering with a residence, vehicle, etc.* - suspicious under almost any circumstances. Possible significance: burglary, theft, malicious mischief, or trespass in progress.
- *Non-resident going into back or side yard of house* - suspicious under almost any circumstances. Possible significance: burglary or trespass in progress.
- *Person running* especially if something of value is being carried. Possible significance: fleeing the scene of a crime.
- *Exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms* - do not approach these people. Possible significance: injured, under the influence of drugs, or otherwise needing medical or psychiatric assistance.
- *Carrying property* - suspicious depending upon the circumstances. For example, if at an unusual hour, in an unusual place, and if the property is not wrapped as if just purchased. Possible significance: subject leaving the scene of a robbery, burglary, or theft.



- *Excessive human traffic to and from a certain residence* - not suspicious unless it occurs on a daily or very regular basis, especially during late or unusual hours. Possible significance: vice or narcotics activities, or a “fence” operation.

### **Suspicious Vehicles**

- *Certain moving vehicles* - especially if slow moving and without lights, or if the course followed appears aimless or repetitive. This is suspicious in any location, but particularly in the area of schools, parks, or playgrounds. Possible significance: “casing” for places to rob or burglarize, drug pusher or sex offender.
- *Certain parked or occupied vehicles* - may contain one or more persons, especially significant if observed at an unusual hour. Possible significance: lookout for a burglary or robbery in progress. True even if occupants appear to be lovers.
- *Vehicles being loaded with valuables* - suspicious if parked in front of a closed business or unattended residence, even if the vehicle is a legitimate looking commercial unit, possibly even bearing a sign identifying it as a repair vehicle, moving van, etc. Possible significance: burglary or other theft on progress.
- *Abandoned vehicle* - possible stolen car.
- *Vehicle Containing Weapons* - suspicious under almost any circumstances. Possible significance: owner may engage in criminal activity.
- *Other unusual activity involving vehicles* - persons attempting to forcibly enter a locked vehicle, especially at night or in a parking lot. Possible significance: burglary, theft, or malicious mischief in progress.
- *Persons detaching mechanical parts or accessories from a vehicle* - suspicious especially at night in the street or in a parking lot. Possible significance: theft or malicious mischief in progress.
- *Apparent business transactions conducted from a vehicle* - suspicious especially if around schools or parks, and if juveniles or females. Possible significance: kidnapping or drug transactions.
- *Objects thrown from a vehicle* - Suspicious especially while traveling at high rate speed. Possible significance: disposal of contraband or garbage dumping.
- *Property in vehicles* - not suspicious unless the property is not normally found in vehicles, especially if observed at unusual hours or if TV sets, stereos, unmounted tape decks, or auto parts are involved. Possible significance: stolen property.

### **Other Unusual Situations**

- *Property in homes, private garages, storage areas, etc.* - suspicious if accumulations are large or otherwise unusual (such as several TV sets in a garage) and if the items are in good condition, but are not in use. Possible significance: stolen property.
- *Property carried by persons on foot* - Normally not suspicious unless at an unusual hour or in an unusual place. Especially questionable if the person is running. May be significant if the property is not wrapped as if just purchased. Possible significance: possible stolen property.
- *Property being removed from or being placed into vehicles or buildings* - not suspicious unless at an unusual hour or place; for instance, from closed businesses or residences

whose owners are known to be absent. Possible significance: burglary or theft in progress.

- *Open or broken doors or windows* - at closed businesses or residences whose owners are temporarily absent. Possible significance: burglary in progress or scene of completed burglary.
- *Unusual noises, etc.* - Gunshots, screaming, sounds of combat, abnormally barking dogs, anything suggestive of foul play, danger, or illegal activity. Call the police immediately!

### **Neighborhood Watch**

The [Neighborhood Watch Program](#) is the cornerstone of all neighborhood crime prevention programs. To learn more about establishing a Neighborhood Watch on your street, contact the Crime Prevention Unit at (805) 583-6950.