

Burglary Prevention: Home Security

Honest people tend to visualize those with criminal intent as we see it on television or in the movies. We think we will be asleep in bed at 2:00 a.m. when a burglar breaks into our home through a window or by crashing a rear door. We're going to wake up and secure our family, call 911 and be ready with our home-defense firearm in case it is needed. The reality is that this scenario is highly unlikely. Breaking into a residence when its owners are home turns a simple burglary into a robbery/home invasion. In Missouri, burglary of a residence or an inhabited structure is a Class B felony, punishable by 25 years or more in the penitentiary. Use of a weapon during the commission of the crime adds a charge of armed criminal action, with commensurate sentencing.



While anything can happen at any time, home burglaries are more likely to occur during the daylight hours when no one is home. When confronted by the sound of a homeowner, many burglars flee right back out the same way they came in. Most that is, but not all, which is why it's always a good idea to keep a home-defense firearm close at hand, if needed. Today's drug addicts, unlike professional burglars, do not necessarily drop and run. Not being mentally stable, they tend to become violent when confronted.

Many people know the importance of situational awareness and the need to not flash valuable items when out and about in order to avoid attracting the attention of the criminal element. However, a fair number of these people fall into a false sense of security when they get home, and it's there that many mistakes are made by those who are otherwise aware and armed most of the day. Here are a few tips on keeping your home and valuables secure, even when you're not there.

Common Methods and Tactics Used by Ruse-Entry Burglars

Ruse-entry burglars will walk right into your home if your front door is open. They look for people out working in their yard. If a screen door is unlocked and the front door is open, that's a ripe target for these kinds of thieves. Because I've dealt with ruse-entry burglars, I know how bold they can be. I keep my own front door shut and locked on summer days when I'm cutting my grass. I close my overhead garage door (since my attached garage leads right into my home), because I know I'm distracted when cutting my front, side and rear yard and that my awareness is lessened by the sound of the lawnmower.

Ruse-entry burglars will walk into your unlocked home and proceed directly to your master bedroom. They will target your dresser tops (jewelry boxes full of valuables) and your top drawers (more jewelry, watches and cash). They'll take your pillowcase in which to haul away your property. That way, they're not carrying a sack when they enter your home. They will check kitchen drawers and china cabinets for checks, cash and other potentially valuable items. If they are confronted, they often pretend not to speak English and feign they are sorry but needed a drink of water.

Among dozens of scams, some ruse-entry burglars will ring your bell and say they are with a local utility company. Never let anyone inside your home without proper identification and know that most legitimate workers do not need to be inside your home. Close the door and say that you will make a call

and verify before letting anyone inside. Legitimate workers will wait and the fakes will take off. Legitimate utility workers are wearing a uniform, driving a marked company vehicle and have a photo ID badge prominently displayed on their chest. However, realize that ruse burglars are skilled at gently pushing and talking their way inside. They're also experts at convincing you that they need to turn on your kitchen water and that you need to watch to see if there is a change in pressure while they go in your basement to check the water tank. Of course, the rushing water in your kitchen sink masks their footsteps going upstairs to your bedroom and stealing everything they can find.

In addition to the water-department ruse, there is the "I'm your new neighbor and I need you to come outside and look at where I want to build a fence along your property" scam. A second accomplice sneaks inside your home while you're distracted outside trying to figure out which one of your neighbors moved. Another common ploy is, "Can you look at this lost dog outside that I'm trying to return to its owner? Have you seen it in the neighborhood?" The scenarios are endless. If any of these swindlers arrive at your door, slam it shut and call the police. Then make sure someone didn't enter your home somehow while you were at the front door.



The Tactical Walls Issue Box keeps your home-defense handgun hidden in plain sight.

If one of these ruse-entry burglars did happen to get into your home, what would they find? Would they find your home-defense or concealed-carry handgun in that dresser drawer on top of your socks? Or are you smart and you have it carried on your person or secured in a lock box? It's also important to note that some states require guns to either be carried on your person or locked away in a safe. Keeping it hidden in an unsecured location may be illegal, so check your state and local laws.

I've taken reports where victims had their valuables in a safe, but it was unlocked. When I asked to see the safe, it was built into a closet wall behind hanging clothes and the burglars missed it (and the cash inside). Luckily, burglars tend to move quickly, so simply hiding the safe saved the homeowner (despite it not even being locked). Another victim said that she feared her grandmother's heirloom diamond necklace and earrings were taken in a burglary. I asked where they were kept, and the victim replied that she kept the necklace and earrings under the first of a stack of sweaters on a shelf in her walk-in closet. Sure enough, when she lifted that first sweater, the diamonds were still there. Luckily she kept them in a place unlikely to be searched by a burglar. The intent in these kinds of burglaries is to get out as rapidly as possible. Clocks, cereal boxes, cans of soup and other innocuous items can hide your small treasures in plain sight.

Keep Your Guns Hidden and Secured

I've been at friends' homes (both cops and concealed-carry citizens) when they've had their loaded firearm out in the open on a coffee table or kitchen counter. It's bad form, even in a house of adults, to leave firearms out. Gun owners should be aware that their home is a target at all times. To avoid tragedies, keep your gun on your person or take a minimalist approach and place it somewhere out of sight.

Gun safes keep all your guns secure, especially when they're bolted to a floor or wall. Mine is bolted to both in my cement basement. In three decades of police work, I never saw a gun safe targeted. However, common sense will tell you that it's not a good idea to leave the tools necessary for breaking into yours on the pegboard of your workbench right next to the safe.



Picture frames that disguise a handgun's location are much better than your sock drawer.

In houses without children, home-defense guns can be smartly hidden in plain sight by mounting a holster underneath a bedside stand. If it has a lip under its top, no one can see the handgun unless they're lying on the floor. Picture frames that swing open to reveal a hidden handgun work well, as do products that conceal a gun inside a tissue box or a wall shelf. Anything to keep guns from being found by burglars rushing through your home works well.

A burglar alarm that immediately summons police without a delay is a great idea. While not all alarms stop intruders, alarms at least limit the time a burglar can spend inside your home before police arrive. For years, I knew how alarms could be circumvented, so I never installed one in my own home. With today's modern cellular technology (no phone lines that can be cut) and "do it yourself, peel and stick" systems, there's no reason not to

have one. My system was purchased online, and I installed it myself in 30 minutes. The monthly monitoring fee is just \$15 and that compares inexpensively to my monthly cable bill. To protect my gun safe, I simply placed a motion sensor directly on the door. During my career, burglars have stated that alarm-company stickers on a home's front and rear doors really do cause them to move along to a softer target.



Most of us know to keep our heads up and not appear distracted or buried in our cell phone when out and about during our daily lives. We know that street robbers (strong armed or armed with a weapon) profile and look for easy victims. People with their heads on a swivel make the criminals think twice. Avoiding certain areas, not staying out late and not flashing valuables helps keep your target profile low.

When we enter our homes, however, we can be lulled into a false sense of security. Think about how you would target your own home from the outside and how you would search your house looking for things to take once inside. Then consider how and where you keep your valuables and your firearms. With a little consideration and awareness, you can secure your belongings to keep them safe.