



SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

CRIME PREVENTION GUIDE FOR
YOUR HOME AND VEHICLE



TRAVIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
COMMUNITY OUTREACH UNIT

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DISCLAIMER

The information provided in this manual should be considered as minimal recommendations to reduce the opportunity for a crime to occur. Following these suggested guidelines in most cases will help keep you from becoming a victim. However, it should be noted there are no absolutes and each situation may have different circumstances.

Also, there is no such thing as a crime-proof structure or building. By following these strategies, you will make committing a crime more difficult for the offender, thus likening the possibility he/she will search out another, easier target.

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INTRODUCTION

Burglary is the fastest growing felony crime in America. Crime statistics indicate a burglary is committed in Texas every two minutes; the next one could be your home. Of the billions of dollars worth of property stolen each year, only a small percentage is recovered. Property crimes also place individuals at risk for serious personal crimes as well. These can occur because people fail to protect their homes and families against illegal entry.

As the crime rate continues to climb, citizens must take extra steps to protect themselves against crime. The rules for protecting your home are very simple and basic. Two of the best measures you can utilize are good common sense and good solid locks. The steps found in this guide are day-and-night, year-round precautions that will work effectively – if you use them. You cannot make a house completely burglary-proof, but you can make entry so difficult the burglar will go elsewhere in search of an easier target. Burglars tend to avoid those homes which will take time to gain entry, or where a substantial amount of noise will be generated by breaking in. Both time and noise will increase the chances of the burglar being discovered and ultimately apprehended.

Crime prevention is a job for you and your neighbors because you are in the best, and often the only, position to do it. The criminal justice system – law enforcement agencies, courts and prisons – primarily deals with crime after it occurs. Law enforcement agencies arrest criminals and play a role in preventing crime, but can never take the place of strong ties among people in the community. It is neighbors who have the most power to stop crime from happening in the first place.

This guide is produced with the same community initiative in mind. It is a basic overview of steps that citizens can take to help reduce the opportunity for crime to occur in their neighborhood. If citizens do not get involved, crime will continue to increase. Crime and the fear of crime threaten a community's well-being. Crime in turn feeds on the social isolation it creates. You and your neighbors can prevent or break this vicious cycle, and in the process, create a safer, friendlier, and more caring place to live.

HOME SECURITY

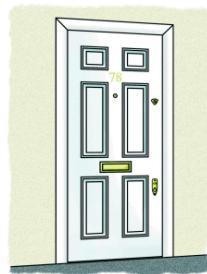
DOORS AND FRAMES

All exteriors doors should be either metal or solid core wood and should be at least 1³/₈" thick. Hollow core and panel doors do not provide the security of a solid core door and should not be used on the exterior of your home.

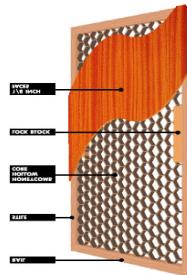
Never open the door to anyone unless you know them. A simple, inexpensive safety device is the one-way, wide-angle door viewer. For your personal protection, all exterior entry doors should be equipped with a wide-angle door viewer of 190 degrees or more. This will allow you the ability to see who is at your door without unlocking it. Door chains or other similar devices do not offer you adequate protection against an intruder.

Door frames often provide little protection against a pry bar. Most door hinges and deadbolt lock strike plates are fastened to the door jamb with 1/2" screws. Many times, the door jamb is poorly attached to the main frame of the house as well. Replacing the screws with 2" screws will help to reinforce the strike plate, making it more difficult to gain entry.

METAL/SOLID CORE DOOR



HOLLOW CORE DOOR



Sliding glass patio doors can be among the easiest entry points for burglars. Special locks are available to secure the door against lifting and prying. Installing a "Charlie Bar" can help keep the sliding door from being pried open. A less expensive Charlie Bar can be constructed using an old broom handle or other wooden stick. It should be cut to the exact length of the exposed door track and placed so that the door cannot be opened when forced.

To prevent the sliding glass door from being lifted out of its tracks, it should be pinned. This can be accomplished by purchasing a specially designed door pin, or by drilling a hole in the door frame and inserting a nail.

Windows can also be pinned in the same manner to prevent them from being pried open. Drill a small, downward sloping hole into the sliding portion of the window and into the frame of the fixed or stationary part of the window. You can then insert a nail or pin to help prevent the window from being pried open.

If you do not want to drill a hole in your window, a track lock is available that will fit any type of aluminum window. The lock features a thumb screw which clamps down on the track and prevents the windows from being pried open. This type of lock allows you to open the window for ventilation without compromising security. These track locks can be purchased at any hardware store.



LOCKS

The most important thing to remember about locks is to use them every time you leave the house, even if for just a few minutes during the day. The most popular times for residential burglaries are weekday, daylight hours. In more than one third of burglaries, there is no forcible entry. In those cases, someone simply left a door or window unlocked and, in essence, invited the burglar inside. Good locks offer no protection if you leave extra keys in obvious places like under the doormat or in flower pots.



The majority of all doors are equipped with a standard entrance latch (also called a spring latch or key-in-the-knob latch). These devices do not provide adequate security. They have a spring which holds a latch in place. They can be defeated by wrenching the knob with a large pair of pliers, by sliding a credit card between the door and the frame, by kicking the door, or by spreading the frame with the pry bar. These types of latches should never be depended upon as the sole manner to secure your exterior doors.

The single cylinder deadbolt is key operated from the outside only. The interior operation is a thumb knob. This lock is best utilized where there is no glass in the door or within 40" of the lock mechanism. When purchasing a deadbolt lock, it is important that the lock has a bolt, which is constructed of case hardened steel, extends a full 1" out and locks into place. When fully extended, the bolt should not be able to be pushed back in by hand. Also, it is important the hole in the door frame is of sufficient depth to allow the bolt to be opened the full 1" - otherwise it cannot lock in place and can be pushed back with a knife or screwdriver.



A double cylinder deadbolt lock is key operated from both the inside and outside. It should be used on doors where there is breakable glass in the door or within 40" of the locking mechanism. This makes it impossible for the burglar to break the glass and reach inside to unlock the door.



For security reasons, you should not leave a key inserted in the inside portion of the double cylinder lock, but at the same time, you should understand without proper preparation, a double cylinder deadbolt can become a fire hazard. In addition to keys kept on your family's key chains, an extra should be kept close to the door (taped under a coffee table or stair banister, etc.) where every member of the family knows the location and can easily access it in case of an emergency. You should weigh the importance of your family's safety in a fire or other emergency before deciding to use double cylinder deadbolt locks.

*Note: If your home is located inside Austin city limits, the installation of double cylinder deadbolts may be prohibited by a Life Safety Code. If you live within incorporated city limits of any municipality, you should first check with your local police crime prevention officer or building code inspector before installing double cylinder deadbolt locks.

AUTOMATIC GARAGE DOOR OPENER

Automatic garage door openers are a great convenience, but they can also serve as a weak link in your garage security. All automatic garage door openers legally require a safety release mechanism that is controlled by a grab handle. This is put into place so that if your automatic garage door opener is malfunctioning or traps someone beneath the door you can manually release and move it.

This safety release mechanism can be tripped from outside your garage door with nothing more than a coat hanger. By disengaging the safety release on your door, a thief can simply lift the door and gain access to your home.

An inexpensive method to prevent this type of break-in is using a zip-tie (or two), to lock the disengaging arm on the automatic opener. While this will prevent the bypass technique employed by thieves, the safety pull handle can still be yanked hard to break the zip ties in an emergency.



HOME SECURITY FOR WHEN YOU'RE NOT HOME

Most burglars prefer to break into a house when no one is home; therefore anything that you can do to make your home appear occupied will discourage burglars from choosing your home as a target. Fortunately, it is relatively simple to make your home appear occupied - don't leave obvious clues that you are gone.

Don't leave notes on the door advertising you are gone or will be returning at a specific date and time. Make sure someone picks up the newspapers or deliveries. It is best not to cancel any mail or newspaper deliveries because that is letting someone know that you are gone.

Have a neighbor or friend you trust look after your house while you are gone. Ask them to change the drapes or blinds around to appear as if someone is home. Request a neighbor to park their car in your driveway and to move it around occasionally. You can also have your neighbor put their garbage out in front of your house. If you are going to be gone for an extended period of time, have someone scheduled to mow your lawn for you as well.

While it is important for some people to know you will be gone, don't tell everyone. The fewer people that know you will be gone, the better. Ensure you leave a TV or radio on, and have several lamps placed on automatic timers.

SOCIAL MEDIA VACATION SAFETY TIPS

A recent Nationwide Insurance survey reveals that 14 percent of homeowners use social media to post updates, share photos or check into locations on Facebook, Twitter or Foursquare while they're on vacation; for 18-34 year olds, this percentage jumps to 41 percent.

According to an article in *Time Magazine*, it's estimated that 78 percent of burglars now use social media to choose the location of their next break-in.

And search features like Facebook's new Graph Search tool could make the research even easier for thieves. Now burglars can quickly find out who checked in at tourist attractions or easily comb through timeline photos for vacation pictures. Don't let your social media behavior during vacation put your home at risk for a burglary.

BEFORE VACATION:

- Do not post the "I'm going on vacation" announcement
- Disable location-identifying settings
- Check your social media tagging settings

DURING VACATION:

- Don't check in or post about vacation
- Capture the photos and save to share/post later



APARTMENTS AND CONDOMINIUMS

People who live in condominiums or multi-unit buildings have special security considerations, especially since there are many people coming and going much of the time. Oftentimes, it is difficult to get to know your neighbors because of the population of multi-unit buildings. Another consideration is that you must go through the management company or landlord to make security improvements.

Some of the things you may want to consider when living in a multi-unit building or complex is whether the landlord has taken steps to ensure your protection. Many of these precautions are dictated by state law, especially in Texas. Visit www.texaspropertycode.org to learn more about state requirements.



SAFETY TIPS

- Always lock your doors when you're gone. If applicable, this includes your balcony door. A balcony door is an entrance just like any other door and can be a security hazard even if you don't live on the first floor. In fact, you should consider protecting them with a deadbolt just like your regular entry door.
- If applicable, your balcony is not a safe storage area. If you keep valuables like your bicycle on the balcony be sure to lock it up. Do not rely on a chain lock, they add little value when it comes to security.
- Make your apartment look occupied by keeping the lights on when you are gone or by automating them to a schedule.
- Get to know the employees that work in your building including safety patrol, contract maintenance, and any grounds personnel. Report anyone that doesn't look familiar.
- Start a Facebook or Nextdoor page for the people who live in your apartment and share anything suspicious. Lookout for each other.
- If your building has locked entry ways make sure that they stay shut and locked. Lookout for tailgaters and ask your neighbors to do the same.
- Make sure common areas like the pool, storage rooms, workout area, and laundry facility are secured and can only be accessed using a tenant or owner key.
- Checkout the apartment during the day but drive back at night. A place can look completely different after you move in and all the lights are out. Is it well-lit? Do you feel comfortable?

EXTERIOR SECURITY

A very important consideration in securing your home is to make sure the exterior is uninviting to a burglar.

Prune back shrubbery that hides the doors and windows or behind which a burglar could conceal himself. Cut back any tree limbs from which a burglar could reach an upstairs window.

Keep your yard well-maintained; this gives the appearance that you care about your home and have taken steps to protect it. Store ladders and tools inside of your garage or storage shed and make sure these storage areas remain locked and well secured at all times.

Good exterior lighting is important and a deterrent for criminal activity, particularly when the yard area is obscured by trees and shrubbery, or if these are dark areas. It is recommended to light your front and back porches with high Linus LED lights.



You can buy inexpensive timers, photoelectric cells, or motion detectors to turn lights on/off when needed. Clearly display house numbers so that law enforcement or other emergency responders can find your home quickly.

Help the neighborhood stay in good shape. Dark alleys, broken street lights, abandoned cars, vacant buildings, graffiti, litter, and other run down areas attract crime. Work with your local government agencies and your neighbors to correct the problems and to clean up your neighborhood.

OPERATION ID

Operation ID is the name given to a nationwide program of marking personal property indelibly with a unique number which acts as a means of discouraging burglary and thefts. Operation ID also permits positive identification of the items if lost or stolen. In communities where it has been properly implemented, the program has shown dramatic results in its ability to reduce burglaries and thefts.

The greatest benefit is that it acts as a deterrent. Burglars know it is often impossible to dispose of stolen property that is properly marked. It increases the burglar's chance of discovery and ultimately their apprehension. On the other hand, many law enforcement agencies have property rooms full of stolen property that they are unable to return to the rightful owner; mainly because there are no identifying numbers or the owner did not know the serial numbers of the items thus making them difficult or unable to be traced.

Operation ID is comprised of three parts:

1. **MAKE A LIST** of all your valuables and keep a copy in a safe place. If you should ever become a victim of a burglary or a theft, you will be able to quickly describe the stolen property from the list. Be sure to include the BRAND NAME of the item, the MODEL NUMBER and the SERIAL NUMBER. The SERIAL NUMBER enables the reporting officer who takes the report to enter your stolen items into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. Property entered into the NCIC database can be recovered throughout the United States by another law enforcement agency.
2. **ENGRAVE YOUR DRIVERS LICENSE NUMBER** on the item. DO NOT use your Social Security number. Engrave your Drivers license number onto the item preceded by the two letter abbreviation for the state (i.e. TEXAS: TX). The eight-digit number should then be followed by DL if you have a driver license or ID if you have a state issued identification card. When you are done engraving your number should look like this: TX1234 5678DL or TX 12345678ID.

Be sure and engrave the number somewhere it cannot be altered or dismantled from the item. It is a good idea to mark the item in two places; first, where it can be easily seen by looking at the item and second, somewhere such as the bottom or inside of the case where the burglar cannot not easily see it. That way if the first number is somehow removed you will still be able to identify your property. Make sure you indicate in your inventory where you marked the item. Place a small Operation ID sticker next to the first number to let everyone know that the item has been marked.

3. **PHOTOGRAPH** each one of your valuables, especially if the item is hard to describe or cannot be engraved, such as custom jewelry. Be sure to include make/model and serial number. Save the images not only in a folder on your computer, but also on a back-up like a CD or flash/thumb drive. Insurance companies encourage individuals to photograph or video all of their insured possessions. This makes filing a claim easier and quicker because you have proof of ownership. It also gives law enforcement a better chance of identifying your property.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Neighborhood Watch is one of the oldest and most effective crime prevention programs in the country, bringing citizens together with law enforcement to deter crime and make communities safer. It involves:

- Neighbors getting to know each other, taking the time to care about each other, and working together in a program of mutual assistance.
- Citizens being trained to recognize and report suspicious activities in their neighborhoods.
- Crime prevention strategies such as home security, Operation ID, and other programs being implemented by citizens.

Neighborhood Watch was created to obtain citizen involvement in discouraging and preventing residential crime. Neighborhood Watch programs are not designed as substitutes for police protection, rather they supplement police activities by providing extra eyes and ears. When neighbors know each other personally, they are more aware of each other's habits and routines. This awareness, in turn, makes them more observant of such activities which are suspicious or out of place. Examples of these activities include strange cars in the neighborhood or suspicious persons who are at your house while you are away.



The participants make their neighborhood a safe place to live by becoming more active and involved in their neighborhood activities. As a result, they become more aware of problems when they occur. This will not take a lot of time and soon will develop into a daily routine of watching out for what goes on in your neighborhood. Neighborhood Watch programs help to create an identity within the neighborhood, which in turn fosters a sense of pride and belonging for the participants. Neighborhood Watch operates to educate participants in the principles of deterrence, delay, and detection.

The program depends on a communications network organized within three levels of participants: the residents, block captains, and representatives from local law enforcement. Reduction in burglary is likely because it is a well-publicized program of prevention and target hardening, coupled with citizen concern for the safety and security of the neighborhood.

To organize a Neighborhood Watch program in your community, contact the Travis County Sheriff's Office Community Outreach Unit at 512.854.9770.

ALARM & CAMERA SYSTEMS

Installing a security alarm and/or camera system in your home or business is an added defense against intruders. People who live alone, or who are away from home for long periods of time should consider the addition of a security system. If you have a large amount of valuable items in your home, or if you live in isolated area, the installation of an electronic/smart system may be a wise investment as well.

SECURITY ALARM SYSTEM

A security alarm can act as a deterrent to burglaries and theft because the common burglar would not want to waste time trying to defeat an alarm. The sounds of an audible alarm will most likely scare a burglar away before he/she is able to complete their crime.

Alarm systems can sometimes be utilized without having them monitored by an alarm company. They may be able to be set to alert or make audible sounds in certain circumstances. Bear in mind that if the alarm is not monitored by the company, law enforcement will not respond upon activation of the alarm.



Insurance companies routinely offer a premium discount to homeowners who have installed alarm systems meeting certain guidelines. Those guidelines are available from any law enforcement agency, the Texas Department of Insurance, or your insurance agent. Keep in mind that you get what you pay for. Quality equipment and service will not necessarily come cheap. No matter how good the system is, it must be installed properly by competent installation personnel to be effective. Remember that no system is completely foolproof. Some burglars are so quick they can break into a home and be gone with thousands of dollars in merchandise in a matter of minutes, before the police can arrive. Some burglars have been known to defeat some alarm systems by cutting the power supply or phone line. Be sure to ask the alarm company what features are available that can ensure that this does not happen.

SECURITY CAMERA SYSTEM

Interior and exterior security cameras are the highest rated deterrents to burglars and criminal activity. Security cameras can provide vital clues to the police in identifying and tracing individuals involved in unlawful activities, such as trespassing, burglary, theft, assaults, arson, etc. Camera surveillance provides assurance that anything and anybody approaching your property and home will be captured on video. You can also research investing in a smartphone-controlled system which allows you to keep track of your home security while you are away.



AUTO THEFT

A vehicle is stolen every 27 seconds in the United States and in recent years, over 1.2 million vehicles were stolen. Stolen cars, vans, trucks, and motorcycles cause economic hardship for victims, increases premiums, and may be used to commit other violent crimes. Everyday, vehicles are stolen from malls, streets, driveways, parking lots and garages, and dealerships. Vehicle theft can happen any place and at anytime. A few common sense tips can help you avoid being a victim of the nations fastest growing property crime.

- Never leave your car running unattended.
- Never leave your keys in the car or ignition.
- Never leave valuables in plain view, even if your car is locked; put them in the trunk or out of sight.
- Install a mechanical device that locks to the steering wheel, column, or brake to prevent the wheel from being turned more than a few degrees. Commonly called clubs, collars, or J-bars, these devices can act as a deterrent if installed properly. Investigate the purchase of a auto security system if you live in a high-theft area or drive a theft-prone vehicle.
- If you park in a commercial garage or lot, always leave just the ignition key with the attendant. Make sure no identifying information is attached. Do the same when you take your car for repairs.
- Carry your registration and insurance card with you. Don't leave personal identification documents or credit cards in your vehicle.
- Copy your license plate and vehicle identification (VIN) numbers on a card and keep them with your driver's license. If your vehicle is stolen, the police will need this information promptly. *The Sheriff's Combined Auto Theft Task Force offers free vehicle VIN etching; call 512.854.9770 to inquire about an appointment.



CARJACKING

Carjacking (stealing a car by force) has captured headlines across the country. Statistically, your chances of being a victim of carjacking are very slim, and preventative actions can reduce the risk even more.

- If the carjacker has a weapon, give up your car with no questions asked. Your life is worth more than your car.
- Keep your car doors locked and windows closed at all times while you are in your vehicle.
- Be especially alert at gas stations, shopping malls, convenience and grocery stores, and intersections; these are all likely spots for carjackers.
- Park in well-lit areas with good visibility, close to walkways, stores, and people.
- Approach your car with keys in your hand. Look around before getting in, especially underneath the car. Make sure there is no one hiding inside of the car before entering it.

H.E.A.T.

Texas H.E.A.T. (Help End Auto Theft) is a voluntary statewide vehicle registration program designed as a theft deterrent. Vehicle owners can sign an agreement with their local participating law enforcement agency that their vehicle is not normally used between 1:00am and 5:00am. The agreement gives blanket authorization to any law enforcement officer in Texas to stop the registered vehicle anytime it is seen being operated within the prescribed time-frame, and to verify ownership by the vehicle operator. Vehicle owners can also grant additional authority, at the time of registration, to have their vehicle stopped anytime of day if it is being driven from Texas into Mexico.

To register your vehicle, contact the Sheriff's Combined Auto Theft Task Force at 512.854.9770. City of Austin residents can register through the Austin Police Department. There is no fee to register and it is good for four years. A vehicle owner must present with the following to the registering law enforcement agency:

- The vehicle to be registered
- Certificate of Title (copy is acceptable)
- Valid driver's license
- Proof of insurance or vehicle registration receipt
- Telephone number where the vehicle owner may be reached between 1:00am and 5:00am.

ONLINE RESOURCES

TRAVIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

www.tcsheriff.org

AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT

www.austintexas.gov/department/police

NEXTDOOR

www.nextdoor.com

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

www.ncpc.org

SAFEWISE

www.safewise.com

TEXAS PROPERTY CODE

www.texaspropertycode.org

TEXAS DEPT. OF INSURANCE

www.tdi.texas.gov

TEXAS DEPT. OF MOTOR VEHICLES

www.txdmv.gov



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE CONTENT IN THIS GUIDE OR
FOR COMMUNITY PROGRAMS/SERVICES, PLEASE CONTACT:

**TRAVIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
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