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What to consider when protecting your home against summer crime

We are approaching the Holiday season, a time when many people take advantage of the extra days off from work to take a short break away from home. It may be to visit loved ones, to holiday or just for some well-earned rest and recuperation.

This however is when one particular group of people within our society do the opposite and put more effort and hours into their 'work'. I am of course referring to burglars, some of whom are what we call 'career criminals, those who make a living from crime.

You need to safeguard your property against them whilst you are away from it.

When considering how best to make your home secure you need to assume the mind-set of a burglar.

A burglar will look for any signs of weakness in your home. They will make a balance between the risks of them being caught against the potential gains to be had. You need to consider what is called target hardening. This is making your property a less attractive proposition to them so that they will consider the risks too great to take.

Anyone can do a self-assessment of his or her home. It is good idea to take the time to do so before you go away. Put it on your pre-holiday to do list. Here is a simple guide of what to look for and some questions to ask yourselves.

Start outside. Look at the front aspect of your home. If the front looks weak to a burglar then they will expect the back to be easy for them too.

The front gate is the first psychological barrier to keeping a burglar away.

Is it kept closed?

Is it in good repair? If not then a burglar may believe that your door and window frames might be unmaintained too, making them easy to force.

Will the gate make a noise opening or self-closing shut? If it creaks or slams shut behind me then neighbours may be alerted when someone is entering the property.



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The driveway will need to be crossed to get to the door and windows. Is it gravel covered, which is noisy to walk on?

Is there a car on the drive? If you are away from home, the car need not be yours. Allow a trusted neighbour to park one of theirs on your drive so it looks like you are not away.
Will an outside light come on as I approach the house?

The front perimeter needs to have a physical barrier to define where your property starts.
Are the front hedges and fences low allowing visibility of the house? Will people see me if I am tampering with your front door or windows?

Your front door is the next main line of defence.
Do you just have one single cylinder lock on the door? If so then it is quite easy to breach and it would be a good idea to fit a secondary lock.
When you are at home is there a door chain on the inside or a spy hole so you can see who is at the door outside? Is the entrance well lit?

Alarms are one of the first deterrents to be noticed by burglars.
Do you have an alarm box on view on the front of your house?

Windows. Have you left any windows open? An open small fan light type window can be enough to reach in through to the handle of the main window, to pass a small child inside or put a wire through to lift the latch on a bigger window.
Can I see straight in or are there curtains or blinds?
Can I see valuables on open display?
Are there valuables on windowsills or close to doors within easy reach upon entry?
Are the windows locked?

Signs in your windows may not be a good idea. 'Beware of the dog' or 'I love cats' advertises that you are less likely to have a burglar alarm or if you do then you may not have set it. In addition, that you may have left doors or windows open for access by pets. Many dogs are quite docile and the mere presence of one will not put off a determined burglar.

Bins. It is bin day and everyone else's has been put out for collection apart from yours? Does that mean that you are not there? Could you get someone to do the bins for you in your absence?

Lights. Are there any lights on inside the property? It is good to leave a light on a timer switch when you are out. Even the light from a fish tank can be a deterrent.

Side gates. I am less likely to be seen at the back and that gives me more time to get inside.
Is there a side gate?
Can I get over or through it easily?
Is it kept locked?

Cameras. Does the house have CCTV cameras?

Porches, garages and other low roofs. Are there wheelie bins, water butts, drainpipes or similar close to low roofs? These are easy to climb on as a step to a low roof. Once on the roof can I reach the windows?

Now take a good look at the back of your home.

Ladders are useful for me to access windows and flat roofs. Not only yours but your neighbours too.
Have any ladders been left outside unsecured or have they been put inside or chained / locked to a tree or similar?

Fences and rear perimeters. Burglars often garden hop to make good their escape.

Are the fences high?

What will I land on when I climb the fence?

Is there trellis, anti-climb paint or plastic spikes along the top?

Are there prickly plants along the boundaries?

Burglars for a number of reasons love sheds and outbuildings. They may contain bikes to make good an escape and tools that can be stolen or used to break into the house.

Is the shed locked?

Do the shed windows have bars behind them so that I cannot remove the glass and climb in?

Is the door hasp fixed with anti-theft screws or can I remove it easily with a standard screwdriver?

Are there expensive bikes and tools on view?

Are they locked or chained up? They may be in a shed but once I am past the door, I can use an unsecured bike to make good my escape.

Are there unsecured tools which I could use to break into a house with? I might steal your tools and break into some else's house – that could prove a bit embarrassing.

Side and back doors. Have you left a key in the lock on the inside enabling me to smash the glass, reach in and unlock the door?

Patio doors. How old are they? Most modern ones have multiple locking points whilst older ones are less secure.

Finally, what should you consider in case a burglar does get in?

Car keys and handbags. Did you take them upstairs at bedtime or are they nice and handy for me to grab from the hall or kitchen?

Calendar. Have you gone away or are at work leaving dates and times on display? If I do get into your house, a calendar on the wall can often give me a good indication of how long I have until you are due to come home.

Valuables. Small items are very desirable to burglars. They are easy to secrete easy to carry, can be quite saleable and are easy to pass on.

Do you have a safe?

Are your belongings property marked with Smartwater, UV pen or similar?

Is your jewellery and personal documentation kept in a location that is not obvious?

Do you have photographs, serial numbers or receipts for your valuables?

Are those kept hidden in a tin fireproof box in a not obvious location?

Other considerations

Are you sufficiently insured? With the value of precious metals having gone up so much recently some victims are finding that they are not.

So as you can see there is a lot to consider. All of the above may deter a burglar. Much of it you will probably have done already. Some of it is common sense. Nevertheless, even if you take on board one point from the above it will be one more step to lessening the chances of you becoming the next burglary victim.

....it is always better to be safe than to be sorry.