

HOW TO AVOID RESIDENTIAL BREAK INS AND THEFT

Thieves love homes that are unprotected and easy to break into; or homes that have many valuables. The following steps elaborate on some methods to avoid having your home broken into.



Lock the doors - Although this seems obvious, many people still fail to do this. This makes it incredibly easy for a criminal to steal items, without difficulty of getting them out of the home (except some furniture); and without leaving visible evidence of the theft, that a neighbor can see from the outside of the home. You can easily break into some older sliding doors by simply popping them off of their frame, even when locked. It's harder to do that with newer ones, but you should still take extra precaution to secure them since they can be an inviting entry for burglars.



Close and lock windows - Just locking doors is pointless if you do not close the windows when gone.

Don't advertise valuables - You do not have to put a list your valuables in the classified for a local newspaper, for a criminal to know what valuables you might have. By placing valuables in plain-sight; such as having valuables in locations like in front of a window, especially on the first floor of the home (i.e. large television or computer system directly behind the large front windows of your home). Also, after purchasing a new plasma screen television or other pricey electronics or appliance, don't leave the box out beside the trash can or recycling bin. That tells people you have something brand spanking new that could fetch a few rand on the street. It may also leave them wondering what other goodies are inside your home.



Also, just because you don't make it obvious for someone who goes by the home to know what's in it, there are other ways a criminal can determine what valuables you have in your home. Be careful of who is knowledgeable of your valuables. By bragging (or telling) about your valuables, even to people you believe are not going to be the burglars; you increase your risk of a home invasion. Even if they are completely innocent, they could possibly tell somebody who is not as upstanding. For those who post information of what they own online, you should also be careful.

Get an alarm - In city environments, these can provide additional security to your home. Invest in a quality alarm, preferably with a cellular backup (because it is quite easy for a criminal to disconnect phone wires leading to your home). Be sure to turn it on, especially in the following situations:

- You leave your home, and nobody is there. Even if you are only gone for a short period of time.
- When you are home alone.
- When you are sleeping.



Tall Shrubs and overgrown trees serve as hiding places for criminals to wait until the coast is clear to get into your house or gain access at the gate. That doesn't mean you need to cut down every plant in your yard. Just keep things manicured.



Low shrubs in front of windows remove additional covering for thieves if they attempt to break in through one. Cut away any tall tree branches that reach upper story windows and outside the perimeter wall. Regularly trimming larger bushes and tree branches also eliminates dark shadows that help hide intruders.



Store tools like a ladder and park bicycles and vehicles in a locked garage. If your garage has windows, be sure to put shades or blinds over them; so criminals cannot see what kind of transportation they can steal. Don't leave a ladder lying around as this can assist burglars to gain access to your house or assist in the getaway over the fence.

Know your neighbours - Getting to know the people you live around is one of the most important safety steps you can take. Closer-knit neighborhoods generally report fewer break-ins because strangers will stick out, and people are more likely to keep a casual eye on other people's security. Studies have consistently found that watch programs and community policing effectively reduce crime in neighborhoods.

Prepare before vacation - Residential crime spikes when residents go on vacations. If you are going out of town for an extended period of time alert neighbors you trust about your trip and ask that they keep an eye on your property during that time. More importantly, when you leave town, don't leave signs of an empty house. That will only make your house look like a giant bulls-eye to a thief. First, if you have a home phone, don't change your message to alert callers that you have left town. Also avoid having piled up mail, overgrown lawns and newspapers strewn about your yard that send surefire signals you're miles away. Have a friend house sit or at least pick up your mail and newspapers. Ask them to move your car periodically to make it look like you're still around. In the summer, arrange for someone to cut your lawn.



STAY VIGILANT!

Although there are people watching out for you in your neighborhood (SAPS and security companies), you also need to watch out for yourself. If you aren't paying attention to what you're doing, you could unknowingly be rolling out a red carpet for a burglar to waltz through your front door.

Educate yourself as well about crime in the area. Attend resident's meetings and check the crime section in your local newspaper to see if your neighborhood has been hit recently. If you notice a lot of criminal activity, that's your signal to pay extra attention to security. And always keep an eye out for suspicious activity in neighborhood. A little added effort can go a long way to protect your home and your safety.