

How to Lock Out Crime: Home Security—Common Sense

If you are like most Canadians, you are concerned about the safety of your home and your community. One particular type of crime that worries Canadians is breaking and entering or burglary. Recent statistics show that burglary accounts for 22 per cent of all property crime.

The **How To Lock Out Crime** series, jointly prepared by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), will make you more aware of burglary and its dynamics and show you how to minimize the likelihood that this crime will happen to you.

The **How To Lock Out Crime** series promotes a **proactive** approach to safety and security. By knowing the conditions favourable to burglars and taking steps to eliminate those conditions, you can greatly reduce the chances that your home will be burgled. Being proactive and implementing a well-thought-out plan can:

- significantly reduce the opportunity for a crime to be committed; and

- minimize the consequences—both personal and property damages—if a crime does occur.

In **Home Security 101**, you were asked to do a visual assessment of your yard and home. Even if all the required bolts, hinges, latches and alarms have been installed, good home security cannot be achieved without first adopting the common-sense precautions outlined in **Home Security—Common Sense**.

Before you move...

If you are considering moving, the time to start thinking about security is before you rent or buy your new home, not after. Survey the neighbourhood to ensure that it offers the level of security you desire. When viewing a home, make note of its surroundings and check for lighting and visibility. Check the quality of doors and windows, including the frames. If the locks are sturdy and in good repair, then security might be improved simply by installing auxiliary locks. If locks are of poor quality or have deteriorated with age, you might have to replace them.

Look for possible signs of forced entry, such as a new pane of glass set among older ones, scratches around locks or hinges, or chipped wood around windows and latches. These could be indications that the home has a history of burglaries. Ask police about the frequency of crime in the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood/Block Watch

Neighbours working together are their own best defence against residential crime. You can help yourself and others by joining a Neighbourhood Watch or Block Watch program in your area. The program coordinates the efforts of concerned citizens and community police to build a safe neighbourhood. Members watch out for each other's homes and report suspicious activities to the police and to each other.

Other key elements of the program include improving residential security, giving residences a "lived in" look all year-round, and registering valuable personal possessions through Operation Identification.

1	2	Ash Street	
Maple Street			3
4	5	6	
Police Number		Fire Dept. Number	
1. Name of Neighbour:			

120 Maple Telephone no. _____			
2. Name of Neighbour:			

122 Maple Telephone no. _____			
3. Name of Neighbour:			

75 Ash Telephone no. _____			
4. Name of Neighbour:			

119 Maple Telephone no. _____			
5. Our House			
121 Maple Telephone no. _____			
6. Name of Neighbour:			

123 Maple Telephone no. _____			

Figure 1 You can make a simple area plan like this, showing surrounding houses and streets, and giving neighbours' names and phone numbers.

Through mutual alertness and co-operation, neighbours reduce the likelihood that burglary and other crimes will occur on their street.

If no program exists in your neighbourhood, you can start one. Your local police can provide advice on getting organized and trained.

Benefits of a Neighbourhood Watch or Block Watch program include:

- friendlier neighbours;
- greater community spirit;
- improved community-police relations; and
- in most instances, a significant reduction in crime.

Operation Identification

Operation Identification is a program that gives people the opportunity to mark or identify valuables as a proactive measure against theft. Stolen articles that are marked are difficult for a thief to sell and much easier for police to trace.

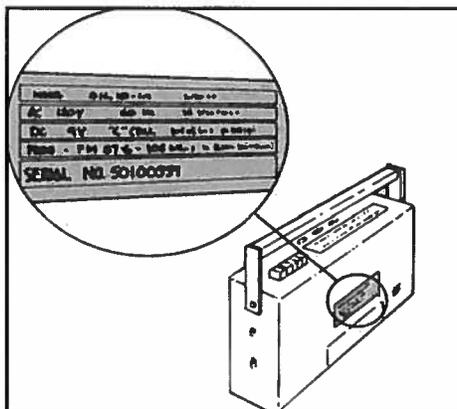


Figure 2 Record serial and model numbers of electronic items.

Your local police force or your home insurance agent can supply you with an electric engraving pen. Engrave your driver's licence number on all your portable possessions that could be sold—such as stereo equipment, cameras, computers, appliances, TVs and home electronics.

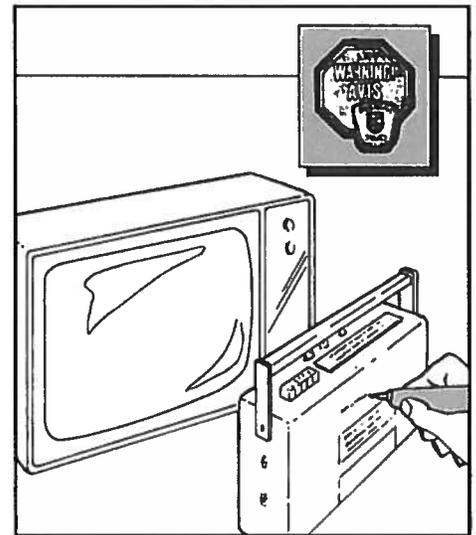


Figure 3 Operation Identification decals warn potential burglars that your valuables are marked for easy identification by the police.

This makes your property traceable and therefore difficult to sell and less attractive to steal. Engraving will also help police identify any of your stolen property they recover as belonging to you. Operation Identification provides a decal for your window to show that your property is identifiable.

Valuables

Avoid keeping valuables (coin and stamp collections, bonds, jewellery, large amounts of cash) at home. Use a safety deposit box. If you must keep valuables at home, list them on a piece of paper together with a full description of each item. If possible, photograph or videotape each item, as well as each room of your home, from several angles. Keep these photographs or videos in a fireproof safe or safety deposit box.¹ A few inexpensive but rich-looking pieces kept in a jewellery box used as a decoy may deter unnecessary ransacking of your home in search of valuables.

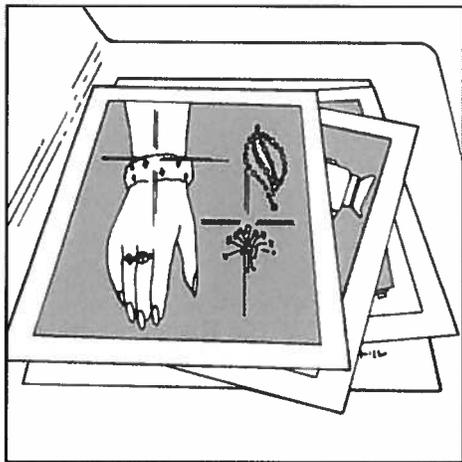


Figure 4 Keep visual records of valuables.

Keys

Common sense security means taking proper care of your keys.

Never tag your house keys with your name, address, licence plate number or telephone number. If you lose them, they could lead a burglar straight to your home. Tag them only with a War Amps key tag, which identifies your keys with a special code.² Never entrust your house keys to auto mechanics or other service people.

Make only as many copies of your keys as is absolutely necessary, and keep track of all copies. High security keys should have the name of the locksmith and “do not duplicate” stamped on the key.

Never keep keys in your jacket or purse. They can easily be stolen and returned without your knowledge.

Educate all members of your household about good key security. Stress the importance of not giving keys to anyone, even briefly (it takes less than a minute to make an impression of a key; the actual key can then be cut at the burglar’s leisure). If you cannot be sure your children will follow your advice, arrange for them to stay at a neighbour’s home when they return from school, rather than giving them a key.

Do not keep a spare key under the front door mat, above the door, in a flowerpot or anywhere else near

your front entrance. These are the first places a burglar will look. If you lose your keys or move into a new residence, you should have all exterior locks re-keyed. It is usually possible to re-key cylinders without actually changing locks.

Garages

Locks on most garage doors are inadequate and can be easily pried off. Overhead garage doors (that is, those that swing out and up) should be fitted with a sliding bolt lock. Hinged doors can be secured by a pair of cane bolts at the top and bottom. Horizontal-panelled doors that slide along a track can be fitted with a pin that inserts into a hole drilled in the track to prevent the door from opening, even if the lock is broken.

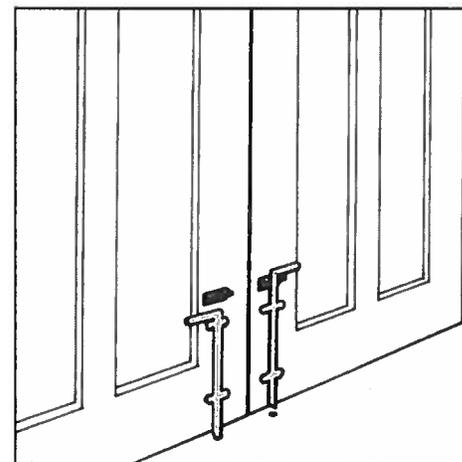


Figure 5 Cane bolts on a hinged garage door.

1 Some household insurance policies require special premiums and protection measures to safeguard coin collections, stamp collections, jewellery and other valuable items. Check with your insurance agent about the specific terms and limitations of your policy.

2 For more information about the War Amps Key Tag and Address Label Service, go to the War Amps website at <http://www.waramps.ca/keytags/> Bilingual, retrieved February, 2007.

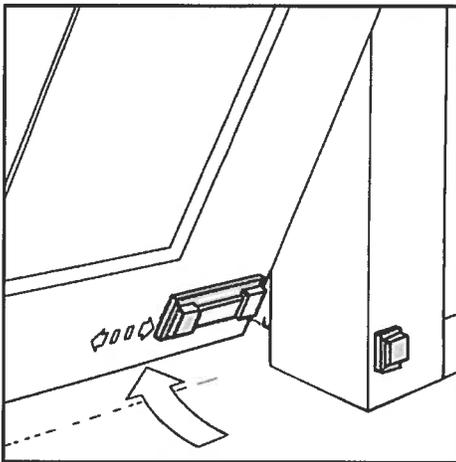


Figure 6 A sliding bolt for a garage door that swings out and up.

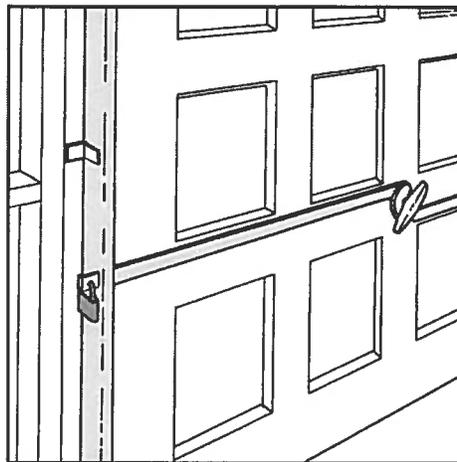


Figure 8 For extra security, drill a hole through the end of a garage door bolt and insert a padlock.

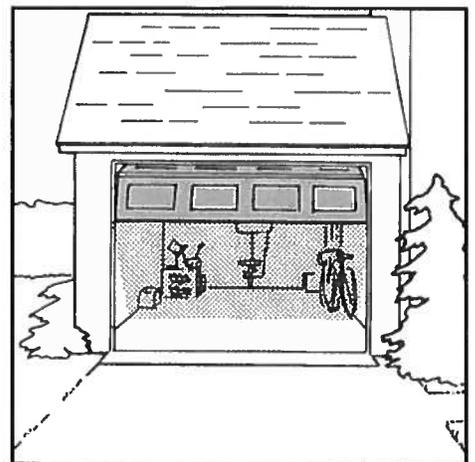


Figure 9 Keep the garage door closed and locked.

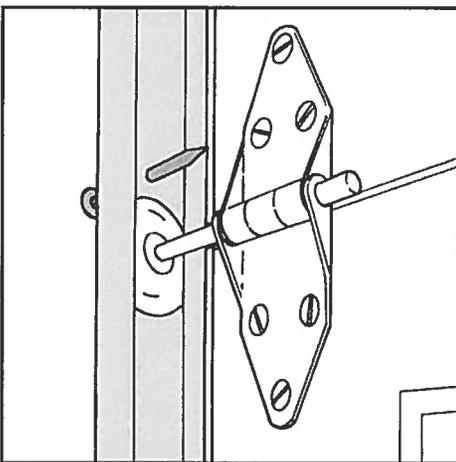


Figure 7 “Pinning” the door track prevents it from being opened.

Be especially careful to secure the garage if it provides access to the house. Put a deadbolt lock on the door leading from the garage into the house. Similarly, any door leading into the house from an attached greenhouse, solarium or addition should be treated as an exterior door and provided with a deadbolt lock.

Avoid wooden garage doors with thin, easy-to-break panels. If your garage door is of this type, you might be able to reinforce the panels with wood or metal braces. If the garage has a side door, make sure it is of solid-core construction, is equipped with a good lock and the hinges and frame are well-fastened and in good repair. Paint over the windows or cover them with a dark curtain or blinds. Keep the area well lit at night.

Never leave the garage door open. Burglars can simply drive in and close the door. Concealed from view they can take their time loading up with your possessions. A well-equipped garage not only contains valuable items, but also tools and ladders that can be used to break into your home.

If your garage has an automatic door opener, be sure it is designed not to respond to stray signals.

Disconnect the unit from the power supply if you will be away for a long time.

Everyday security

- Use large, easy-to-read street numbers on your home. Be sure they are illuminated and visible at night. Pedestrians and neighbours who see someone lurking in your yard can't notify the police if they don't know your address. Do not display your family's name outside the home as this allows a burglar to look up your phone number and call to see if you are home.
- Ask to see identification before allowing service people (meter readers, inspectors, repair people) into your home. Call the company they claim to represent, but look up the telephone number yourself. If someone comes to your door asking to use the phone to call for assistance, offer to place the call yourself.

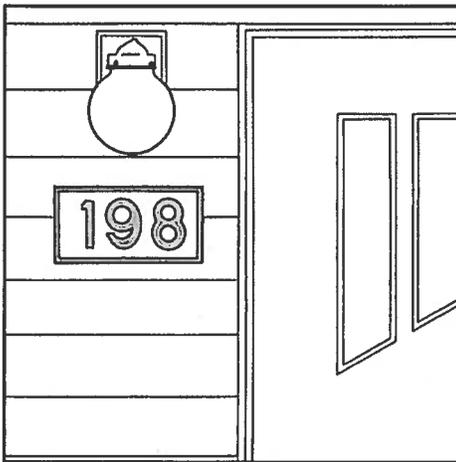


Figure 10 Use contrasting colours and keep street numbers visible at both the front and rear of your house.

- Don't give information about your household to telephone surveys.
- If you have an alarm, use it.
- Lock all doors and windows when leaving home for the day or evening (or even a short time). Ensure that every family member adopts this habit. Engage the deadbolt locks, not just the key-in-knob locks. Never put a note on the door saying when you will be back. At night, use timers to turn on lights, radios and TVs in a pattern that corresponds to your normal activities.
- Be sure the babysitter knows where you can be reached in an emergency and what to do in the event of a fire. Instruct the sitter never to admit anyone unless an adult is present.

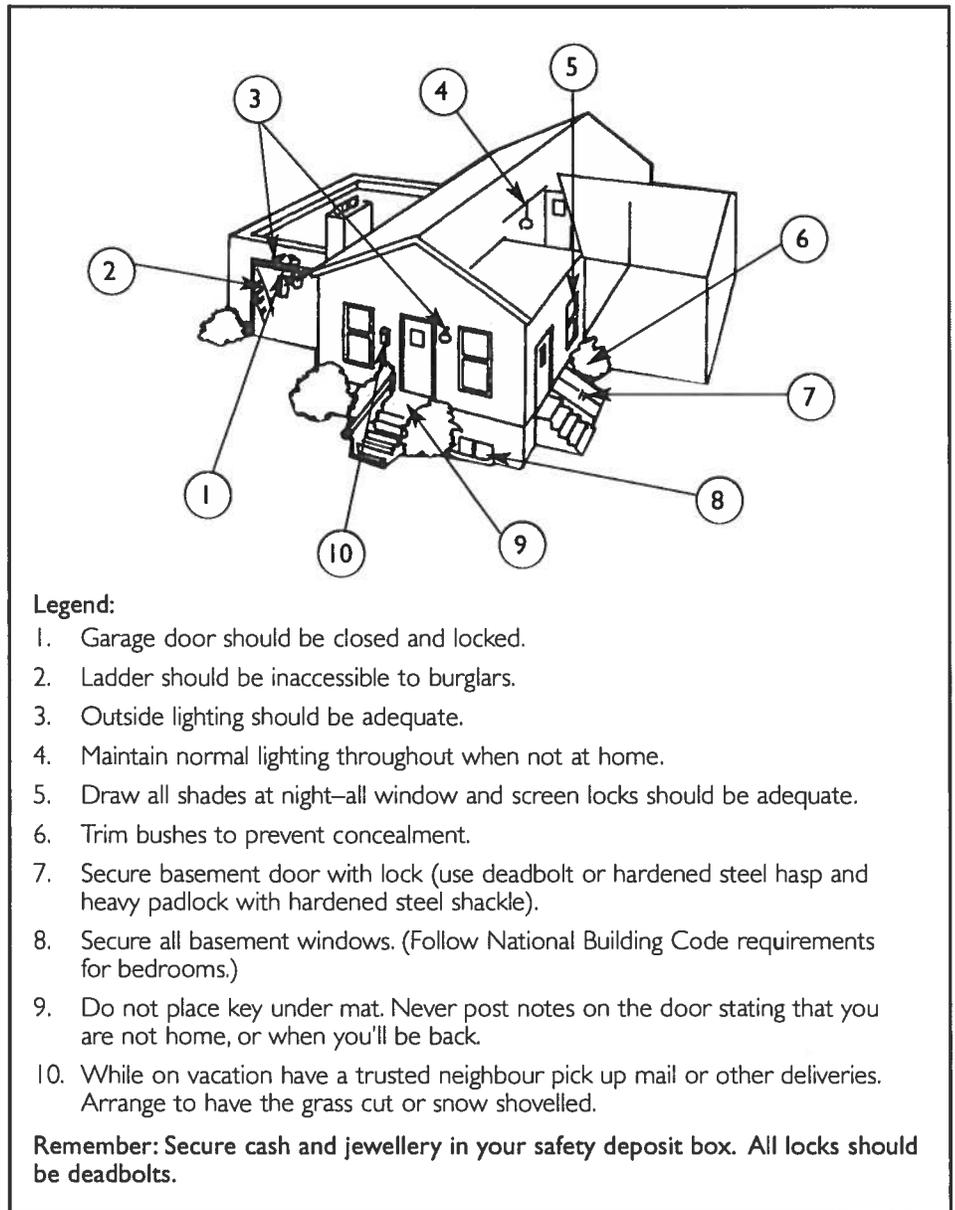


Figure 11 Many police departments are willing to help homeowners make a security check of their property.

If a caller persists, the sitter should call police. All phone calls should be answered; an unanswered call may suggest to a potential burglar that the house is unoccupied.

- Store lawn mowers, barbecues, bicycles and snowblowers out of sight. Lock exterior basement doors and doors to cabanas, garden sheds and enclosed patios and porches. Keep ladders stored out of reach under lock and key.

- Check that windows and doors are secured before retiring for the night. Pay particular attention to basement windows and sliding patio doors. In hot weather, patio doors are used so often that the last person using them will often leave them unlocked.
- Avoid advertising when you will be away (either in person, in print, or through a message on your answering machine). An advertisement in the paper that requests respondents to call after 5 p.m. suggests that the house is unoccupied during the day.
- Don't include the address of a deceased person in a newspaper obituary—a burglar would be almost guaranteed of finding the deceased's house empty during visitation hours and the funeral. The same holds true for newspaper wedding announcements giving addresses, dates and times of unoccupied homes.

Vacations

Planning a vacation? Here are a few do's and don'ts:

- All family members, including children, should avoid advertising your vacation plans in advance. Load your car or trailer in the garage rather than in the driveway. The fewer people who know you will be away, the better.

- Arrange for a trusted neighbour to collect your mail, mow and water the lawn, or shovel the walk, and do anything else that helps give the home the appearance of being occupied; alternatively, hire someone to perform these services. If you have a burglar alarm that does not shut off automatically, you will have to entrust someone with a key and instructions on how to turn the alarm off. This person should also know your itinerary and where you can be reached in an emergency.

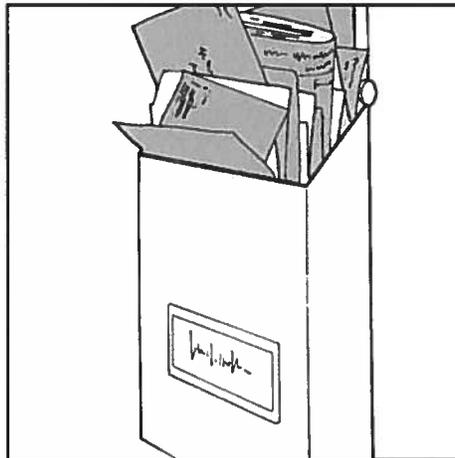


Figure 12 Arrange for a neighbour to collect your mail while you are away.

- As an inexpensive security measure, use timers that will turn lights on and off in several rooms in a pattern that corresponds with your normal activities. Exterior lights should be wired to a photoelectric switch that will turn them on at dusk and off at dawn.

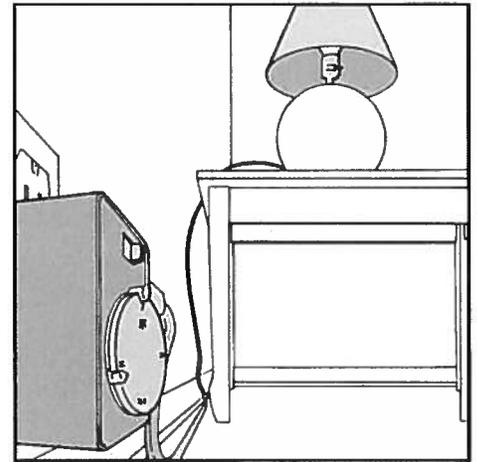


Figure 13 Use a timer to turn on lights, radios and TVs when you are away.

- If your drapes are normally open when you are home, leave them that way. If you have a second car, leave it parked in the driveway.
- Leave a radio playing to indicate that someone is home.
- If you will be away for several months, consider getting a house sitter.

Advice for victims of burglary

If you return to your home and find signs of forced entry, do not go inside. Call police from a neighbour's phone.

If you encounter burglars in your home, stay calm. Do not attempt heroic measures. Let the intruders know you will not try to stop them and that they can take what they want. Try to observe and remember their height, dress and other identifying features. Call the police as soon as they leave.

Do not touch anything or clean up until police have investigated. You may, however, make a list of missing items.

If you cannot see how the burglars got in, consider the possibility that they may have obtained a duplicate key. Re-key your locks. If the locks are inadequate, use the opportunity to install better ones.

Conclusion

Once you have completed your security analysis and have made improvements to weak areas, take another look at the checklist in **Home Security 101**. Go back through the list and re-evaluate your residence.

Home security is a matter of being alert, aware of your surroundings, and proactive. It is not necessary to build a bunker to protect your home, but it is necessary to use common sense and take precautions. Remember that no system is 100 per cent effective, but you can take steps to considerably reduce your chances of being a target.

We hope that the ideas and alternatives presented in this publication will assist you in developing an effective security program. True security is a partnership between you, your family, your community and public agencies. It is only by working together that we can make our communities safer places to live.

About Your House

How to Lock Out Crime: Home Security—Common Sense

The fact sheets in the **How To Lock Out Crime** series describe various specific actions you can take to make your home less vulnerable:

To find more **About Your House** fact sheets plus a wide variety of information products, visit our website at www.cmhc.ca. You can also reach us by telephone at 1-800-668-2642 or by fax at 1-800-245-9274.

Free Publications About Your House *fact sheets*

How to Lock Out Crime Series:

<i>Home Security 101</i>	<i>Order No. 65527</i>
<i>Home Security—Exterior</i>	<i>Order No. 65529</i>
<i>Home Security—Alarms</i>	<i>Order No. 65531</i>
<i>Home Security—Doors</i>	<i>Order No. 65533</i>
<i>Home Security—Windows</i>	<i>Order No. 65535</i>
<i>Home Security—Patio Doors</i>	<i>Order No. 65537</i>

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