

# Home Security Audit Guide



# Welcome Home!



It doesn't matter if you've been away for a few hours, for the day, for the weekend, or for an extended holiday. It takes burglars only a few moments to smash their way into your home, check the predictable places for valuables, and be on their way again. You are left not only with the physical loss and inconvenience, but also with a sense that your privacy and your home have been violated by strangers.

That's what happened to members of this family. Returning home from work, they found their front door kicked in and several rooms ransacked. Missing was a large amount of cash they were saving for a vacation. Even their daughter's piggy bank and their son's coin collection were gone.

## Here's how the home looked to the family.



Well, it's not my fault if people make it easy for me to earn my living. This house **was just asking to be burglarized**. I first noticed it two weeks ago, and I've passed it several times since then, just waiting for an opportunity. They could have made it a lot harder, a lot less inviting. Let me show you what I saw when I checked the house out as a potential target.

## Here's what the crook saw.

*patio door not secured  
(using standard latch only)*

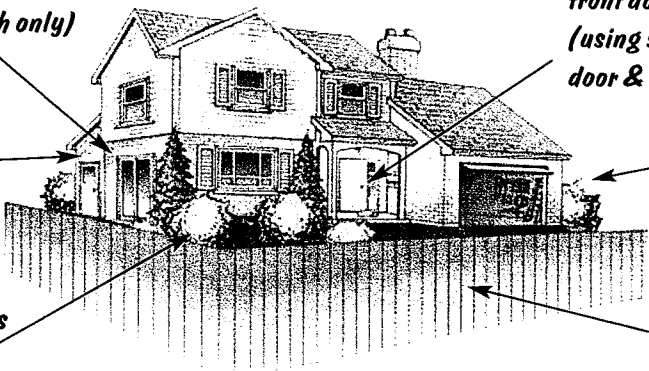
*no lights*

*overgrown bushes  
provide cover*

*front door lock set is weak  
(using standard builder's  
door & locks)*

*garage door open;  
ladder and tools  
available*

*high fence  
screens yard*



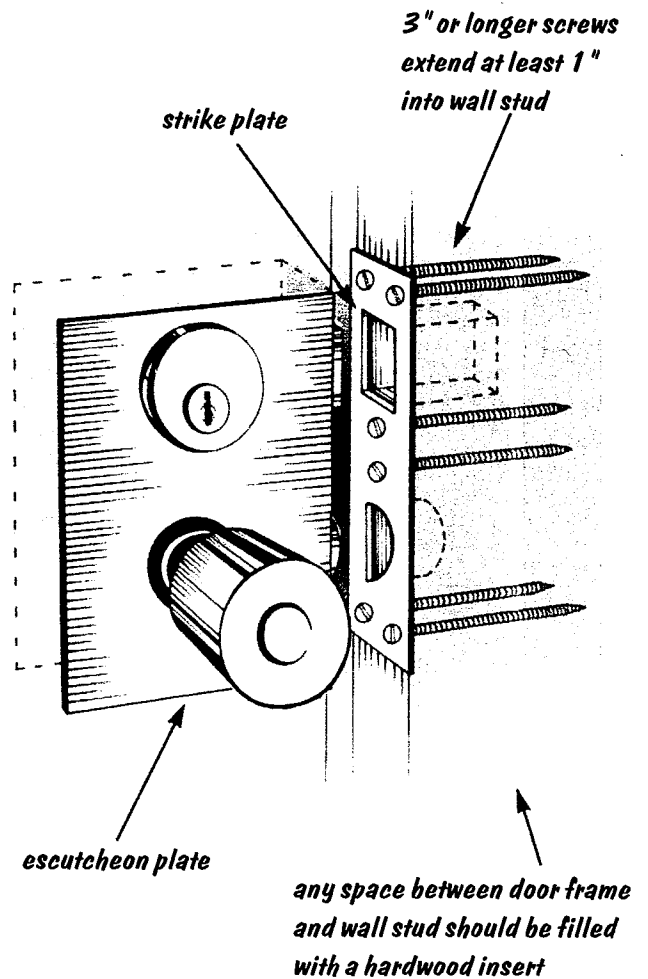
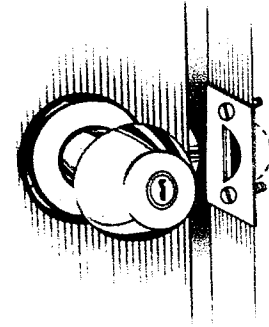


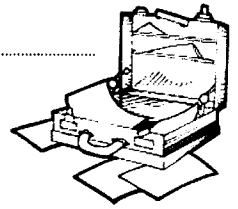
The first thing I noticed, even from the street, was that the front door did not have a secure lock. There was nothing reinforcing the area around the lock, and that told me that the homeowner probably hadn't done anything to strengthen the rest of the door frame. One common way of breaking into a house is simply to kick in the front door. When you think about it, there's really very little chance of being heard or seen – a lot less than if I went creeping around the house for a few minutes looking for an open window.



Start with a good deadbolt lock, but recognize that's not enough. The frame, door and lock must work together to resist physical attack. For example, a strong lock is not effective if the frame is not reinforced around the strike plate. Without reinforcing, the lock can be pried open by bending the frame, or the door can be simply kicked in. Remember, a burglar isn't concerned about damage and will be a lot more physical than you will be when you are testing your doors.

There are many different types of locks that will discourage a burglar. A locksmith should be able to provide you with several options and explain their proper installation.

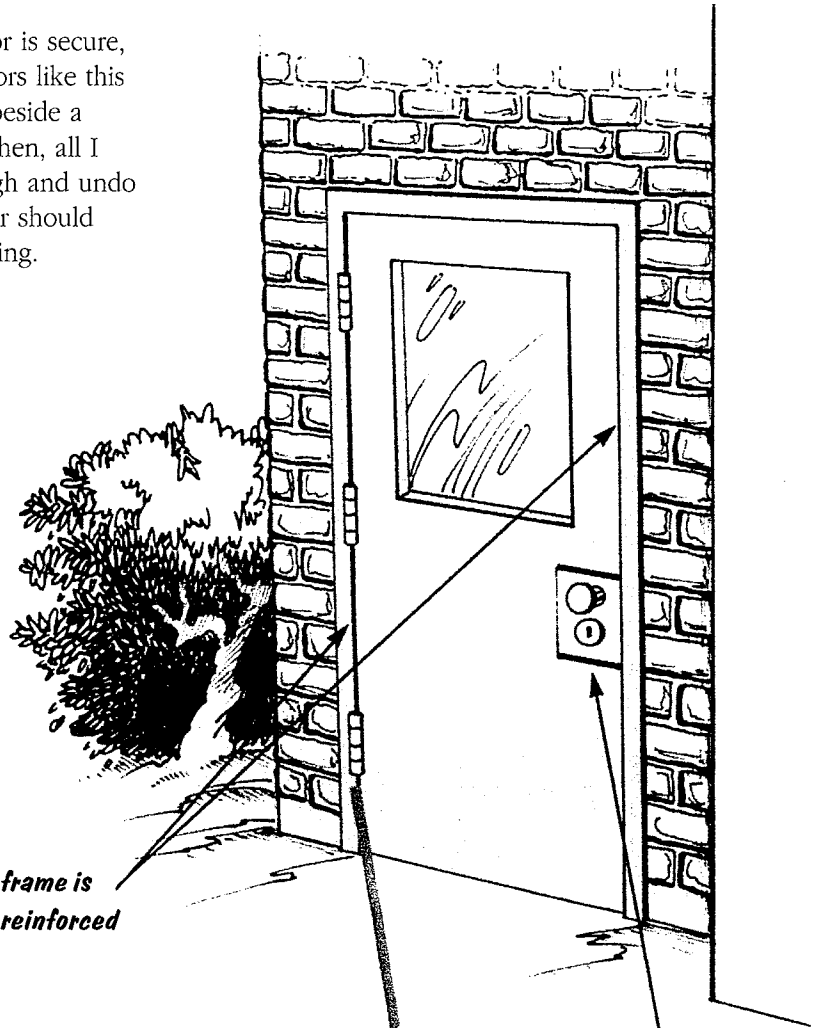




*I can't believe they took my office files...how do I tell my boss the last 2 weeks of work is gone!*



Of course, if the front door is secure, there are always other doors like this one. Areas of glass in or beside a door are easy to smash. Then, all I have to do is reach through and undo the lock. This kind of door should have burglar-resistant glazing.

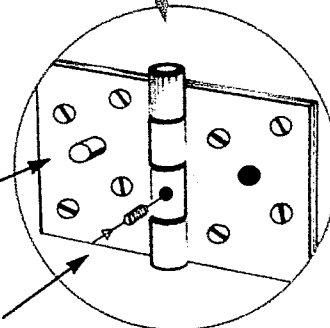


*frame is reinforced*

*lock set is as secure as front door*

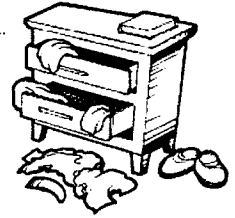


Hinges are another weak point of many doors. If your hinges are exposed, they should be modified as shown here.



*pins prevent removal of door from frame*

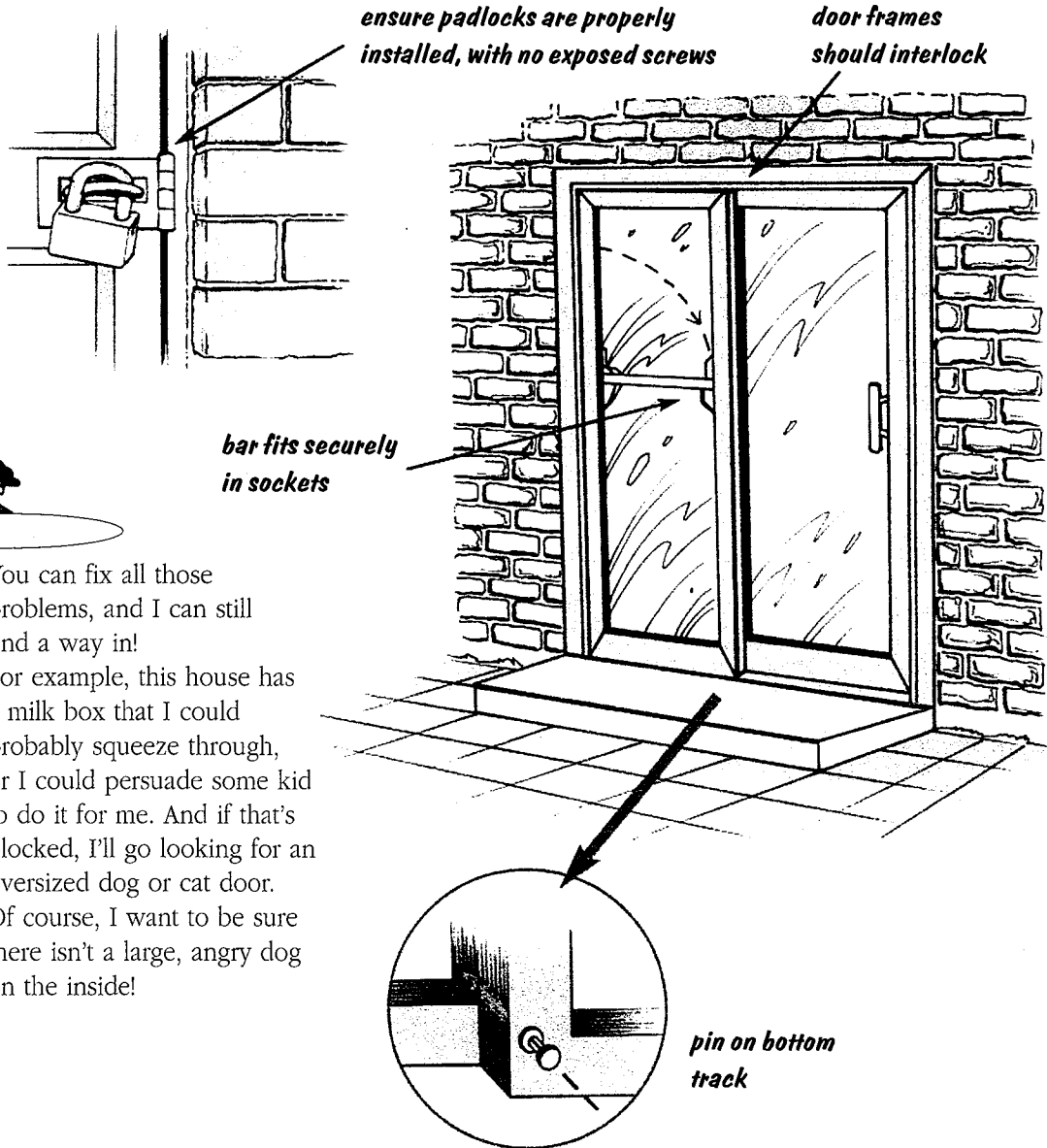
*or lock screw prevents hinge pin removal*



*I feel so violated.  
They took all our clothes and threw  
them all over the room.*

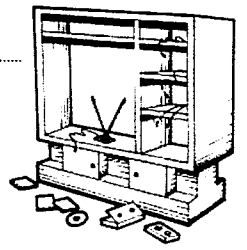


There are other doors that also need attention. Unprotected patio doors can be easily lifted out of their tracks and unlocked garage doors give access to tools and ladders that can help a burglar. If there is a door from the garage to the house, a crook can enter the garage, close the door, and gain entry to the house without worrying about being detected.



You can fix all those problems, and I can still find a way in! For example, this house has a milk box that I could probably squeeze through, or I could persuade some kid to do it for me. And if that's blocked, I'll go looking for an oversized dog or cat door. Of course, I want to be sure there isn't a large, angry dog on the inside!

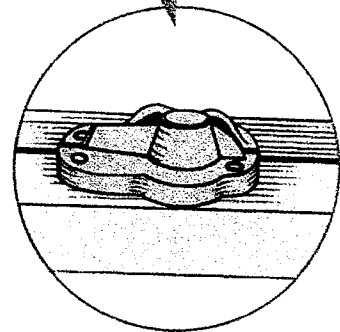
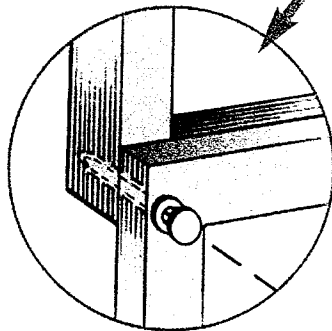
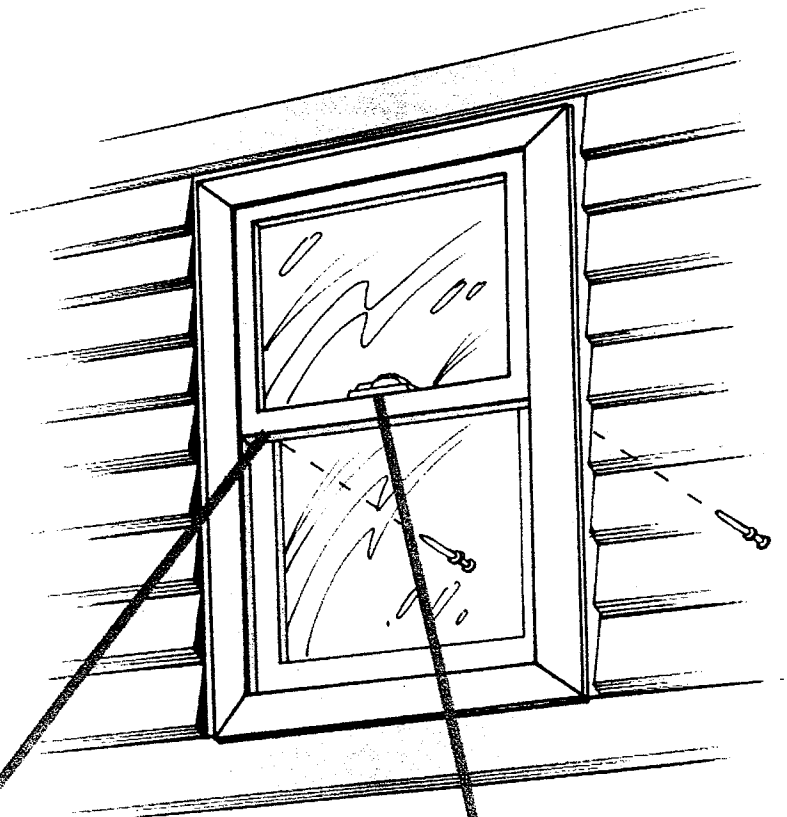
*Our stereo, VCR, and television...gone. All our videos, even the ones of our kids... how do we replace them?*



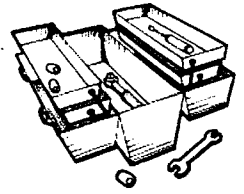
When I was looking over this house the first time, I noticed that there were other ways of getting in that were almost as easy as kicking in the front door. The windows on the ground floor were ordinary window glass, and they'd been left open an inch or two. The upstairs windows, which I could reach from the porch roof or using a ladder that was thoughtfully left in the garage for me, were even easier. And if anyone saw me they'd probably just think I was a window washer.



It's easy to correct these problems, as shown in these illustrations. The simplest way is to drill holes through both frames and insert a double-headed nail. You can even drill a couple of holes allowing a window to be fixed in different open positions. Just don't leave the opening large enough, or position the nail, so crooks can stick their hands in and remove it!



**Note:** These are two examples of how to secure your windows. Check with your local police for more information.



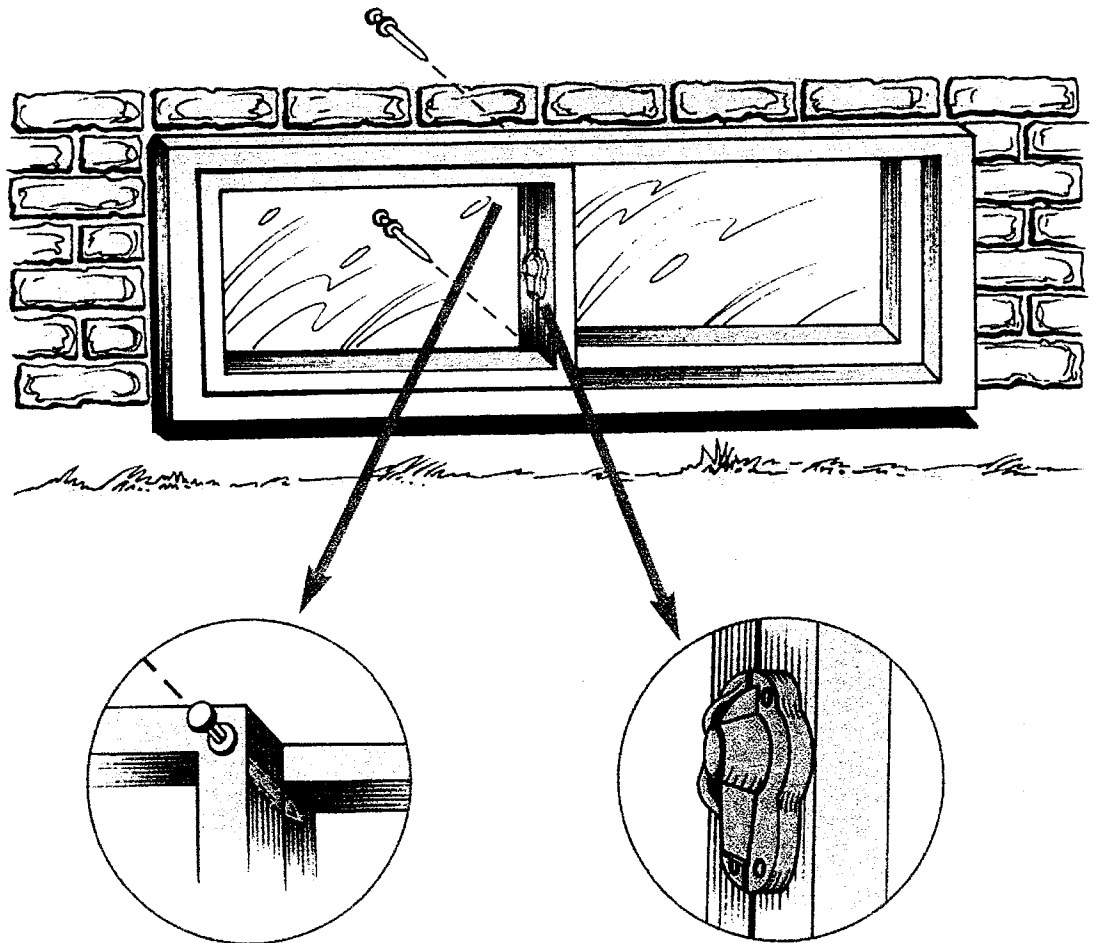
*All my tools are gone.  
Some of them my son gave me  
for Father's Day.*



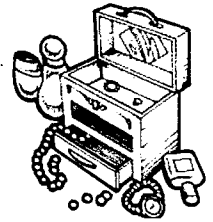
Basement windows are usually pretty easy to open. Not many people bother to install burglar-resistant glazing materials or use proper latches. These windows are often hidden by fences, shrubs, or other obstacles.



Strengthening the frame, using break-resistant materials instead of ordinary window glass, installing pins as described for the above-grade windows – these all help discourage burglars. While bars on windows are an option, they must be equipped with a quick release device so they can be easily removed from the inside in case you need to use the window as an emergency escape route.



**Note:** These are two examples of how to secure your basement windows. Check with your local police for more information.



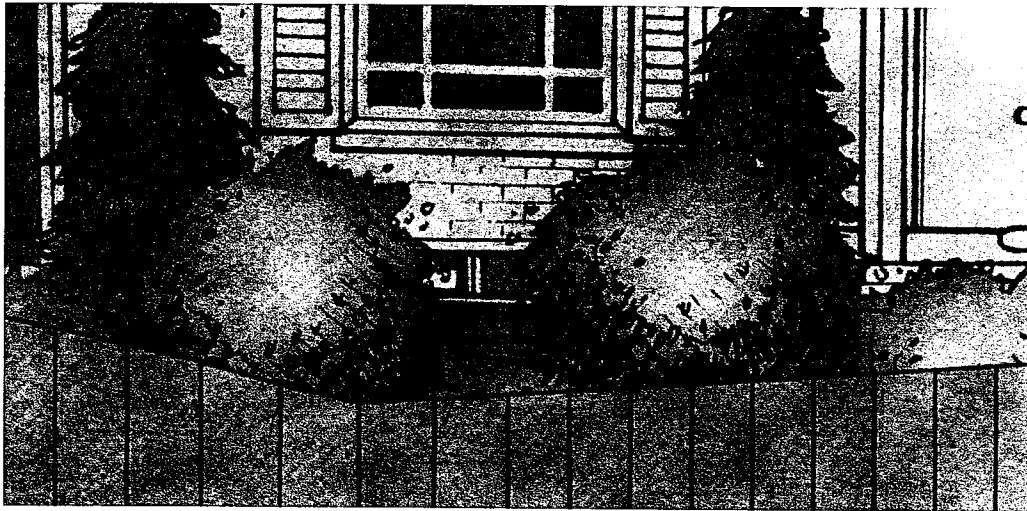
*They took my watch, my wedding rings,  
and my pearls. They were my great  
grandmother's. I'll never see them again!*



One of the features that makes this house very attractive to me is that the family obviously likes its privacy. The solid fences and high bushes, especially around the windows, are designed to keep people from seeing into the house and property. That also means that once someone like me gets behind the fences or bushes, I can't be seen either! I always worry that some nosy neighbour will interrupt me while I'm at work, but with a setup like this, *I feel a lot more secure.*



We spend a lot of time in communities like this one trying to encourage neighbours to watch out for each other through programs such as Neighbourhood Watch. But there's not much point to all that if houses are hidden from view. Privacy is fine, but try to leave good sight lines to the doors and windows, to make it more likely that a suspicious activity will be noticed.



**Note:** Is your house hidden from view?





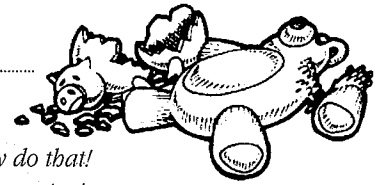
Good exterior lighting is also important; it helps eliminate that unoccupied look. It should illuminate all of the potential entry points, and it should be installed so that it's difficult for someone to disable it by removing or breaking the bulbs. And be careful not to create areas of sharp contrast and deep shadows – they make detection difficult. Some of the newer systems provide two levels of illumination – a low level which is activated at dusk by a light sensitive photocell and stays on all night; a high level that is triggered by a motion detector.



I really dislike lights that are hooked up to motion detectors. Interior lights on timers also can give a home an occupied look when it's empty, but I'm pretty good at spotting the patterns when lights go on and off at the same time every night.



**Note:** Do you have a good lighting system?



*How could they do that!  
My kid's money. Joey was so upset-  
look at his teddy bear.*

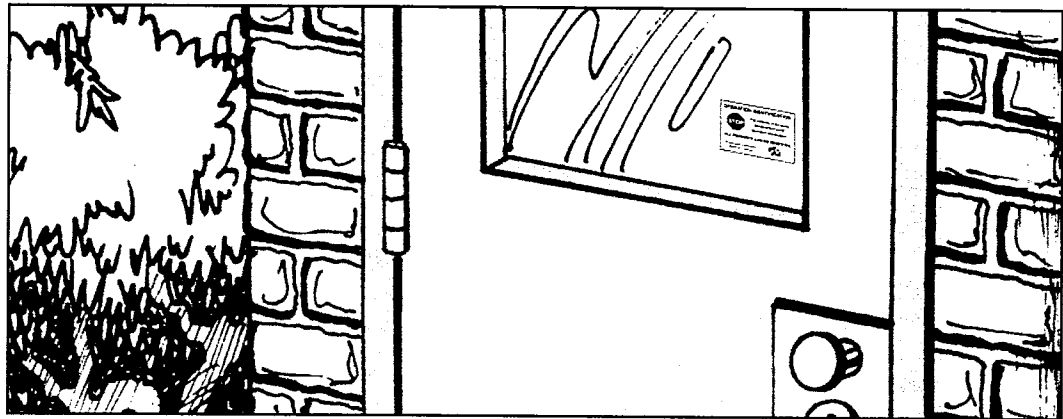


There are other ways you can deter a would-be burglar. One of the best ways is making it clear that all the valuables in the home have identifying marks. You can use your driver's licence number as one way of doing this. It's most effective if the number is right out in the open where anyone can see it – that really reduces the value on the black market!

You should also make a record of all valuables. Photographs are good for hard-to-describe items such as artwork and jewelry. A narrated videotape of your home and valuables is a great idea. Just don't store the video or other records with any valuables, or both may disappear at the same time. It's a good idea to store these items off-site, in a safety deposit box for example.



It's also true that I try to avoid communities that are actively monitored by Neighbourhood Watch or similar programs such as Citizens on Phone Patrol. There are lots of other neighbourhoods where I can find some excellent targets for breaking into, without running such a high risk of being spotted.



While residential alarms should not be considered as replacements for the other measures, I suggest you may want to integrate an alarm system into the residential security program. If so, choose a system with flashing lights and loud alarms that attracts immediate attention to the fact that someone is trying to break into your home. If the alarm system is monitored, consider choosing one that can distinguish between real and false alarms. Any alarm systems used in combination with other measures increase the level of security for your home. Consult with your local police service for more information and any local requirements for noise emitting/audible devices, before talking to an alarm company.

# Extended Leave Checklist



All of the things we've pointed out so far will help to improve your home security, but there are some special precautions you should consider when you are going to be away for an extended period of time, such as a family vacation.

Inform a trusted neighbour of your departure and return dates. The neighbour with the clearest view of your home is the most important one to contact. Be careful not to broadcast the fact that you will be away.

Where possible, cancel deliveries. Ask a trusted neighbour or make arrangements with a relative or good friend to pick up newspapers and mail, and to put some garbage at the curb on garbage collection day. In general, the more you can do to make your home look "lived-in," the less likely it is that a burglar will identify it as unoccupied, and therefore a target.

If practical, remove valuables from your home. Small valuables should be stored in a safety deposit box.

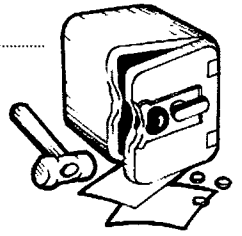
Use clock timers to activate lights and a radio at various intervals; mount motion-activated lights over dark areas.

Have someone check inside your house on a regular basis. (This may be a requirement to keep your insurance policy in effect; check with your broker, agent or company representative.)

Arrange to have your lawn cut or walkways cleared of snow.

Lock your garage door.

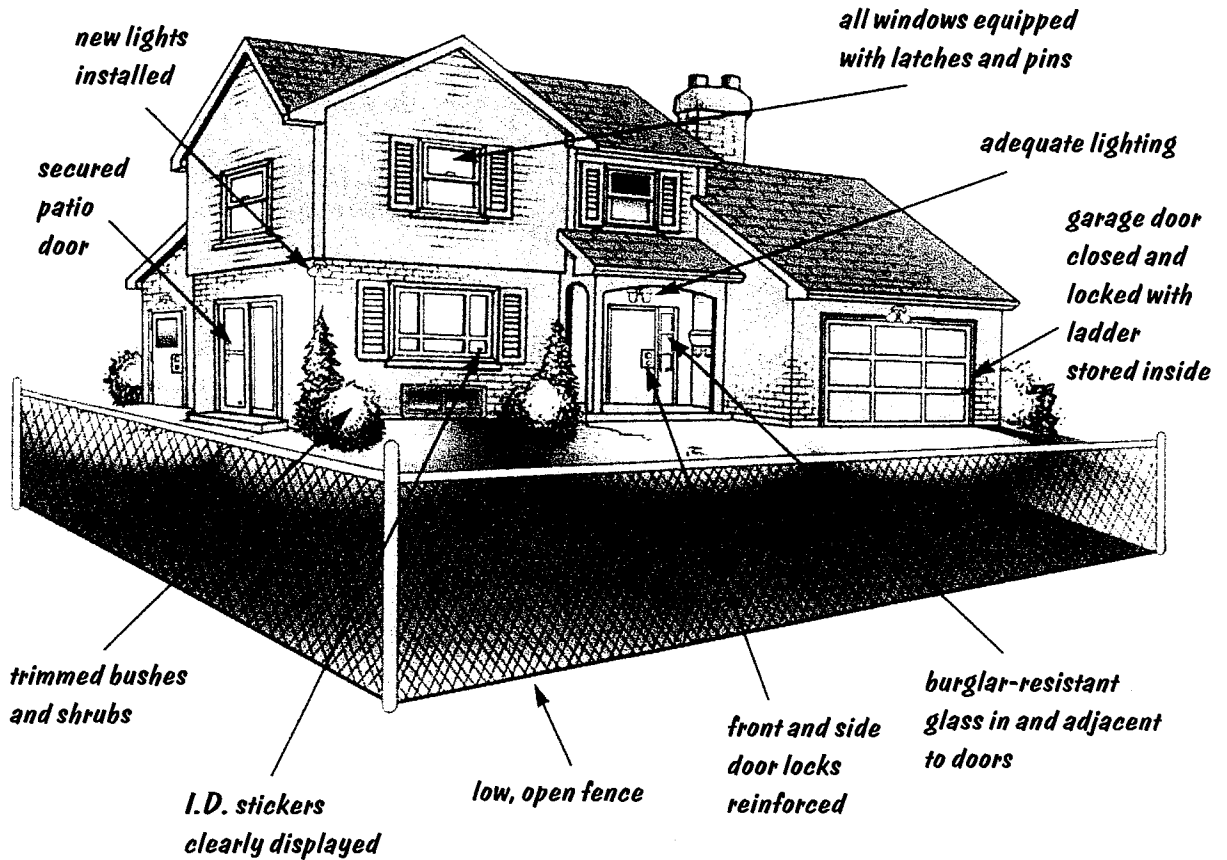
*All the money we were saving for our vacation and my son's coin collection ...gone!*



If you've taken all the steps outlined in this handbook, your house will be a lot less inviting for burglars. Take the extra step and become part of your Neighbourhood Watch program, or help to organize a Neighbourhood Watch, Citizens on Phone Patrol, or a similar community-based crime prevention program. You can get more information from your local police service.



If this house had looked like this two weeks ago, I would have chosen an easier target. Now it looks like it's time to move on. Your house could be next.



**Note:** "How Safe is Your Home?"

# Home Security Checklist



**Make sure your home isn't the next target on the burglar's hit list.**

Complete the following checklist and take steps to improve any item that presents a security weakness. If you need more details, consult with your local police service. Use the space on the inside back cover to record names and numbers of reliable sources for repairs or renovations.

- Are all exterior doors and their frames sufficiently strong to withstand an attack?  Yes  No
- Are hinges on exterior doors either not accessible from the outside or modified so that they don't represent an easy means of access?  Yes  No
- Are dead bolt or equivalent locks properly installed on all doors?  Yes  No
- Are sliding glass doors adequately secured?  Yes  No
- Are garage doors secured and kept locked?  Yes  No
- Are basement and ground floor windows (including those in doors) made of burglar-resistant glazing materials?  Yes  No
- Are there any inside locks that can be reached and opened (within 40 inches or one metre), should the door glass or any adjacent window be broken?  Yes  No
- Are service accesses such as milk boxes, or cat/dog entrances, small enough to prevent even a child from gaining entry?  Yes  No
- Is exterior lighting installed and operational at all entry points?  Yes  No
- Are all windows fitted with security pins or nails or other reliable latching devices?  Yes  No
- Is there a wide-angle peep hole in all exterior doors?  Yes  No
- Is there burglar-resistant glazing on windows and glass in or beside doors?  Yes  No
- If you have burglar bars installed on any windows, are they equipped with quick release devices so people can get out easily in case of fire?  Yes  No
- Are extra keys secure – not hidden under a mat or flower pot?  Yes  No