

Home Invasion & Vehicle Break-ins

Home invasion is on the rise. Many criminals know that traditional commercial targets, like convenience stores, have taken action to protect themselves with alarms and surveillance in addition to having reduced the availability of cash. However, homeowners who view their home as an unlikely place for a robbery may inadvertently leave their home and family easy targets for a potentially violent home invasion.

Facts about home invasion

A home invasion occurs when criminals force their way into an occupied residence to commit a robbery or other crime.

A home invasion is unlike a burglary. Burglars traditionally strike during the day when a home is unoccupied and are likely to be deterred by alarm systems, strong locks and doors, and barred windows. They often flee when confronted. However, home invaders typically strike at night or on weekends when residents are at home. They attack when alarm systems are likely to be deactivated, and their strategy is dependent upon taking control of a home.

Home invaders often target residents to find more lavish homes to invade. They may select a victim by the car he or she drives or the jewelry he or she wears and **follow that person home**. Many home invaders will first attempt to enter a home as a repair person or gain a glimpse into a home by delivering a package. These robbers typically work in groups and they rely on their ability to overcome their victims when the opportunity is right.

The most common point of attack is the front door or garage. Sometimes home invaders kick down the front door to enter a home. More often, home invaders impersonate delivery persons to get residents to open the door. Either way, home invaders will inevitably use extreme force to take control of the home and intimidate the occupants. This initial confrontation is often the most violent part of the home invasion and is the point in which a family's safety is most at risk. After taking control—often subduing residents with duct tape, rope or handcuffs—home invaders bent on robbery will typically begin to search their victim's home for valuables. They will sometimes force victims to locate hidden items, open safes, and provide PIN numbers to ATM cards.

How to help prevent a home invasion

A home invasion occurs when criminals force their way into an occupied residence to commit a robbery or other crime.

- Fortify your home with solid core doors, strong locks and security devices on windows. To strengthen locks, secure heavy-duty strike plates with at least four three-inch screws.
- Keep all doors and windows in the home and garage locked at all times.
- Install a peephole and use it before opening your door. Make sure your porch light is in a position to help you see persons at your front door clearly.
- Never open your door to strangers or solicitors and never rely on a chain-latch. If a solicitor acts suspicious, call the police.
- Keep window shades closed at night. Windows can give a criminal a lot of information about your home's vulnerability. If a home invader can't see into your home, he may not feel confident about storming in.

- Never make it obvious that you're home alone. The fewer the occupants, the easier a home invader's job becomes. A single occupant may be the opportunity a home invader is looking for. Keep extra lights on. Use a television or radio to create the illusion that more people are in the house.
- Hold a meeting with your family to discuss home security practices. Too often, the weakest part of a home security system is the habits of occupants. If your family is educated about the risks and certain home security practices are followed, this will greatly reduce the risk of a home invasion.
- How to protect yourself should your home be invaded

If an intruder is able to get inside your home, here are some things you can do to help protect yourself and your family.

- Cooperate with the invader(s). This may help calm the criminals and reduce the likelihood of violence. No matter how discomfoting it is to lose your valuables, do not risk your life.
- Avoid looking the intruder(s) in the eye. If a criminal feels you can identify him, he may react violently.
- If you own a firearm, you may want to keep it hidden in your master bathroom. Victims of home invasion are most often contained in the master bathroom.
- Establish a code word or phrase with a friend who regularly calls you on the telephone. Should this person call during a home invasion, you could claim that you're expecting an important phone call and that not answering would arouse suspicion. If the home invader lets you answer, you could use this code word or phrase to alert your friend to call 911.

Car theft/break-in is a serious, but very common crime that many unfortunate people become victim to. Nearly 2.5 million car break-ins are reported every year, which averages out to 281 break-ins every hour.

Unfortunately, there is no sure way to prevent your car from being broken into, but there are ways to decrease your risk significantly. There are many precautions you can take, some more expensive than others. Of course, the more money you spend to protect your vehicle, the safer it will be. However, you can keep your car relatively safe without spending any extra money.

Basic, Low-Cost Methods

1. Park in well-lit, high-traffic areas. The best option is a parking structure; the worst option is an alley.
2. Before leaving your car, make sure there is nothing valuable sitting in plain sight. It is best to just not keep expensive items in your car, but for some things (like a stereo), there is no alternative. Don't leave purses in your vehicle while you run in "real quick." A thief only needs a minute to ruin your day.
3. Roll all of the windows up all the way and lock all the doors. This should be obvious.

Taking these precautions is certainly no guarantee that your vehicle will be safe, but it leaves you in the least risky situation possible without spending money on your car's security systems.

Initial Purchase Considerations

1. Before purchasing a vehicle, do some research on the cars you have in mind. Certain makes and models of vehicles are more frequently/easily broken into than others.
2. If you purchase a custom stereo, try to get one with a detachable faceplate so you can take that with you when you leave the car. It seems like a hassle, but in the long run, it's worth it. Remember, if they can't see anything of value, there is no incentive to break-in.
3. If you install a sound system or any auxiliary video equipment in your car, to try make it as inconspicuous as possible. If someone can look into your windows and see expensive custom systems, they will want to smash those windows.

This information is advisory in nature. No liability is assumed by reason of the information in this document.