



The South Armour Heights Residents' Association

Focusing on Security

We live in a safe and friendly neighbourhood, and it is very easy to become complacent about home security. But, even in the SAHRA neighbourhood, break-ins do happen.

With the holiday season ending and our return to a steady routine (which thieves love), here are some brief thoughts and suggestions on home protection to consider.

75 percent or more of break-ins happen during the day. Thieves don't want to be confronted – they are looking for a quick in and out. They may be monitoring the activity on a street to see when people leave and return. Nannies or parents may not lock every window or door in the house for the short time it takes to drop off or pick up kids from school. Even 10 minutes gives a thief enough time to execute a costly break-in!

Burglars will stake out a house for days, studying the owner's patterns. They can be middle aged or older, male or female and dressed to fit into the neighbourhood. Their accomplice may be in car nearby. They may pretend they are reading meters, meanwhile they are surveying the street. Most construction crews are hardworking and honest, but there may be the temporary construction employee working for a builder and noting the habits of the neighbours for a future break-in. Some thieves drive up and down streets looking for large discarded TV or computer boxes in the trash....advising them of new electronics in the house. Use box cutters and place them in your blue box out of site.

Lock your doors, even when you are at home! While you are raking in your back yard – lock your front door and garage door. The suspect can quickly grab your purse, wallet or car keys if you leave them by the front door. If they have entered your house and you see them, they may fake an illness or say they are lost and are in the wrong house. Note their description, and as soon as they leave, call 911. Watch for where they go and look for their getaway car.

Burglars look to see if you're home and look for a point of entry. Remove any potential hiding places. Big bushes in front of a window give the robber opportunity to hide and perhaps the opportunity to wrap a rock around his jacket and quietly break the window gaining access.

Is your home secure?

- To avoid windows with alarm contacts, a robber can get into a basement by removing the windowpane. Make sure basement windows are inside the frame, not just a windowpane secured by a simple trim.
- Install sensor lights high enough that a burglar can't easily unscrew the bulbs.
- Use deadbolts on all your doors. It does mean you need a key for the inside and the outside to unlock your door, but it deters a break in.
- Condo owners need to lock their doors and windows too. A burglar can climb to an unlocked balcony door and let themselves in.
- Keep burglar alarm stickers fresh. Faded stickers signal a non-functioning or non-existent alarm system.
- Old storm doors will break under the force of a strong shoulder, so make sure your doors are solid.

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- Sliding doors are especially easy to break into so install a metal riser along the bottom or put a latch to lock track, so they can't be lifted out. For bigger windows and sliding doors, use decorative bars to avoid break-ins. A skilled burglar can use a pin or a credit card to open up most cheap locks.
- Motion detectors need to be carefully positioned to be effective and most aren't. Most of them don't scan the foot and a half closest to the floor, so a robber can crawl on his stomach and pass by undetected. Make sure your detectors are aimed at the floor and position one at the foot of the stairs, which will keep the burglar to just one floor. Motion detectors cannot detect movement behind hiding places such as bushes and trees.
- Include garages in your home security. They contain lawnmowers, tires rims, bikes, motorcycles, cars. Passage doors and overhead doors should have the same level of protection as the entrance doors to your house. Once inside the garage, the criminal is out of sight.

Other Considerations

- Just like when using your pin number at a store, cover your entry code when opening the garage door or house.
- Do not give free roam to contractors and their assistants.
- Remember that shed and detached garages may have valuable tools that need to be locked.
- Do not keep valuables in your vehicles. This includes smartphones, GPS, etc. If you need to keep them in your car, even momentarily, lock them into the trunk to prevent opportunistic thefts. You should not leave registration and other valuable documents in the car, including identity documents that give name and home address information. You should not store the extra set of house keys in the car. Thieves will look for parking cash in various storage compartments including the ashtray. Remember, once they get into your car, they have access as well to everything in your trunk. Car dealerships recommend that you NOT lock your glove compartment....the thieves will break into it even if you haven't left anything valuable there. Don't leave the car running on those cold, snowy days.
- Do not announce on FACEBOOK that your entire family is going on vacation. Somewhere you may have a photo of your house, your address, all kinds of details that thieves look for.
- If you are a collector, avoid proudly exhibiting the display near the window.
- Thieves look for wedding announcements and have been known to steal all the gifts during the date and time the family announced they are celebrating elsewhere.
- The first place robbers go is to the hallway or kitchen looking for wallets, keys, etc. and then to the master bedroom for money, jewellery and other valuables. Place your valuables in a safety deposit box.
- Be aware of your neighbourhood. Who is coming and who's going.
- When you go on vacation, inform a neighbour of your departure and return dates. Place a hold on your newspapers. Where possible, cancel all deliveries. Arrange to have the lawn cut and walkways cleared. Use timers to activate lights at various intervals. Have a neighbour pick up mail.

For all the technology we use to keep us safe, sometimes the best deterrent is a watchful community. That's why it's important for SAHRA families to know your neighbours!

Thanks to SAHRA Member Debora Bergeron for preparing this article