



Rural Crime Prevention: Home Security

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Community and Rural Development Introduction

Approximately fifty thousand burglaries are committed each year in Oklahoma, and more than two-thirds of these burglaries occur in homes. The direct financial loss from burglary is in the tens of millions of dollars.

In rural areas, where people once gave little thought to even locking the front door, burglaries are becoming a frequent occurrence. While property crimes are individually considered less serious than violent crimes (crimes against the person), on a collective basis, the magnitude of property crime in rural communities far outstrips the seriousness of violent crimes.

Among the factors contributing to the increase in rural crime is the rise in affluence of rural citizens. Within the past few decades rural households have come to include televisions, stereos, microwave ovens, specialized tools and equipment, and other easily fenceable items. These households become ideal targets for burglary as a growing number of women join their husbands in working away from home.

While crime was once considered an urban problem, the tremendous mobility of American society today enhances a criminal's ability to cover great distances to strike and quickly get away. The increase in mobility has been realized not only in terms of transportation but in where we make our homes as well. Thus, the makeup of many neighborhoods changes frequently enough that neighbors lose track of those living around them. Therefore, seldom is any attention given to a stranger in a rural community who otherwise would have been scrutinized.

While rural citizens have little control over such broad technical and social changes, control can be exercised over one of the fundamental elements of rural crime - opportunity. Amateur and professional criminals alike are seeking opportunities to steal without being seen, without taking much time, and without making much noise.

The rural resident can take some relatively simple steps to make burglary attempts more trouble than they are worth. By creating situations in which the potential thief must take time to enter your home or which increase the chances of being seen or heard, the criminal will be encouraged to look for an easier target.

Secure Your Windows

The windows in a home are perhaps the most difficult entry point to protect since most are made with easily breakable glass. However, burglars are most likely to break the glass in order to unlatch a window. Crawling through a broken window is dangerous to the burglar and will make more noise. Therefore, various measures can be taken to make opening a window more time consuming and difficult.

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Double-Hung Windows

Most double hung windows are locked with a small thumb-turn latch in the center of the window. Such a lock can be pried open or easily reached through a broken pane.

Special keyed locks such as in Figure 1 are available from hardware and building supply stores. Although the key should be kept away from the window, everyone in the house should know where to find it in case of emergency.

Figure 2 illustrates an easy, inexpensive way to prevent windows from being opened from the outside. By drilling a hole through the top frame of the lower window and continuing into the frame of the upper window, a nail or eyebolt can be inserted. The window cannot be opened until the "pin" is removed. A second set of holes can be made while the windows are partly open to allow for ventilation.

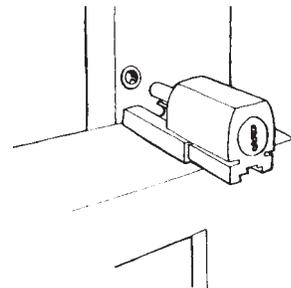


Figure 1.

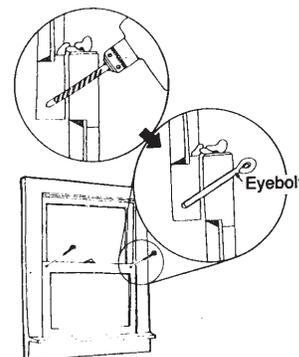


Figure 2.

Sliding-Glass Windows

Some sliding-glass windows may be secured with a pin in the fashion described for double-hung windows. Keyed locks are also available for sliding windows.

As in securing sliding glass doors, sliding windows can be secured by placing a wooden dowel or broomstick in the sliding track. The window cannot be forced open with such a bar in place.

However, some sliding windows can be lifted out of the tracks and removed completely. To prevent removal of the window, install screws or bolts on the upper track. Drive the screws in such that the window cannot be lifted up and pulled out from the bottom. Be sure to allow sufficient clearance for the window to slide back and forth easily (see Figure 3).

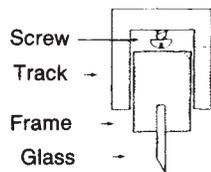


Figure 3.

Windows With Air Conditioners

Installation of a window-unit air conditioner can create a weakness in home security. Burglars posing as air conditioner repairmen can remove the window-unit to gain access to the home unless security precautions are taken. Ways to use metal restraining bands, padlocks, and bolts should be investigated to make sure the air conditioner cannot be easily removed.

Install Storm Windows

In addition to the energy conservation benefit of storm windows, most styles of storm windows enhance the security of a home. Such windows are difficult to remove quickly, and, even if the window is somehow forced open, the original window remains for the burglar to enter. Thus, the burglar will be inclined to seek an easier target elsewhere.

Basic Door and Lock Security

The primary consideration in door security is the construction of the door itself. Regardless of the strengths of locks, hinges, and the door frame, a door constructed with a hollow core requires relatively little time and effort to break through.

Solid wood or metal doors offer a significant security advantage as they provide strength across the entire width of the door. Doors filled with composition wood also offer strength at less expense than solid wood doors.

Strengthen Strike Plate

The strike plate is the metal plate which receives the doorknob-bolt to hold the door closed. Typically, the strike plate is mounted with short wood screws onto the three-quarter inch door frame.

One determined kick near the doorknob assembly and the strike plate and door jamb are broken loose, and the door is open.

A quick and easy solution to such a weakness is to replace the short screws with three-inch wood screws to penetrate beyond the door frame into the wall studs (Figure 4). Also, a heavy duty strike plate can be installed for additional strength.

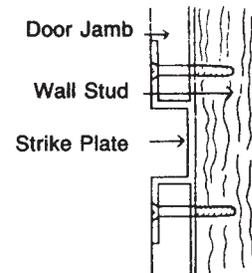


Figure 4.

Secure Door Hinges

Most doors leading to the outside of a home are constructed with the hinges on the inside. A burglar cannot remove the hinge pins and take the door out of the frame.

However, hinges on the outside of the door should be replaced with the new ones having non-removable pins.

A less expensive method of strengthening hinge security is to replace the middle screw of the hinge with a metal pin or a headless screw (Figure 5). When the door is closed, the end of the pin will fit into the opposite hole. Thus, if the hinges are removed, the door still cannot be lifted from the frame.

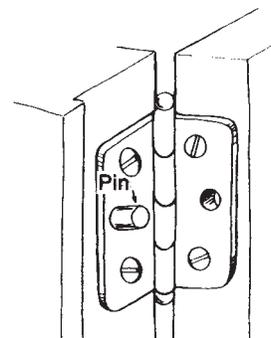


Figure 5.

Use Adequate Door Locks

The vast majority of homes have cylindrical or key-in-the-knob locks on the outside doors. Such locks can be easily opened by sliding a credit card or other flexible material between the bolt and the frame. Even with a deadbolt plunger, the cylinder of the lock, which is located in the doorknob, can quickly be removed with a pair of vice grips and a screwdriver.

A deadbolt lock added to the door is perhaps the best locking method available. When the key is turned, the lock mechanism slides a strong metal bolt from the door into the frame (Figure 6). Recommended features of a deadbolt lock include:

- a deadbolt with at least a one-inch throw (the bolt should extend one inch into the door frame).
- connecting screws on the inside of the door holding the lock together.
- a strike plate attached to the door frame with screws at least three inches long.
- a lock cylinder with a steel guard (a ring around the key section). The cylinder guard should be tapered or should rotate around the key section to prevent wrenching.

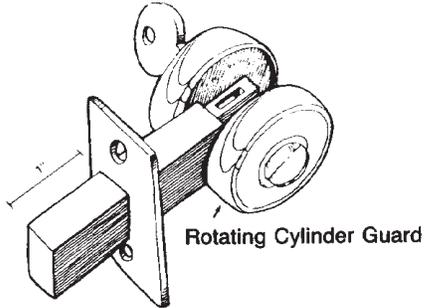


Figure 6.

For doors with glass panels, a double-cylinder, deadbolt lock should be considered (Figure 7). Such locks require a key to open from either side. Therefore, a burglar cannot break the glass and reach through to open the lock.

The key should be kept out of reach of the glass panel but near the door in case of emergency.

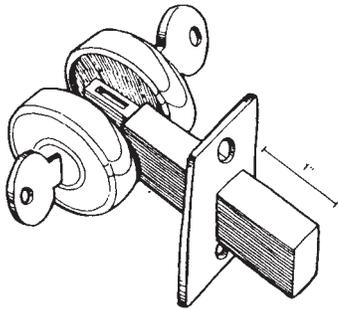


Figure 7.

Another style of deadbolt lock which is relatively easy to install is the auxiliary rim mounted lock (Figure 8). The lock is attached to the edge of the door with long screws, and a plate is aligned with the lock and secured to the door frame. When the key is turned, strong metal bars join the two parts of the lock.

Secure Sliding Glass Doors

Several types of locks are made especially for sliding glass doors such as in Figure 9. A wooden dowel or broom handle can be placed in the track of the closed door to prevent opening as well.

Some sliding glass doors can be lifted from the tracks and removed completely. Methods to prevent this include:

- adjusting the rollers so the door cannot be lifted high enough to pull out from the bottom.

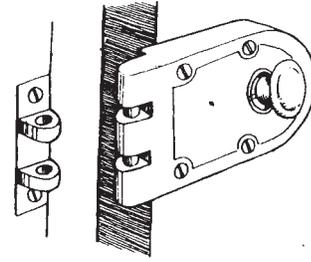


Figure 8.

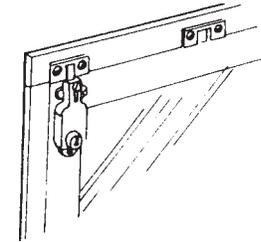


Figure 9.

- inserting screws into the top of the frame to prevent the door from being lifted. Remember to leave sufficient clearance for the door to slide easily back and forth.
- drilling a small, angled hole in the frame and part way into the door. Insert a pin into the hole when leaving the house.

Design Landscape for Security

Thick trees and bushes can shroud a home in beauty. However, they can also provide ideal cover for a burglar to work. Therefore, the lower limbs of trees should be pruned to promote visibility of the house while still providing shade. Also, hedges and bushes should be trimmed away from windows.

High wooden fences are ideal for the privacy of the burglar as well as the homeowner. If privacy fences are installed, a sturdy lock should be present on all gates.

Prepare Your Home for Vacation Time

When making vacation plans, a few simple precautions should be taken to reduce the chances of burglary. The most fundamental measure to be taken is to avoid creating signs that no one is home.

Automatic timer devices are available which can switch certain lights off and on at pre-set intervals. For example, a timer can be set to turn a living area light on at dusk and off at your normal bedtime. A bedroom light can be set to go on at that time and go off twenty minutes later.

Remember also to avoid external signs that no one is home. A neighbor might be asked to pick up mail and newspapers each day. Arrangements should be made for lawn care in the summer and to remove snow from walk ways in the winter.

Other tips for vacation time include:

- have a neighbor check inside the house periodically, especially if the house is not visible from neighboring homes.
- notify local law enforcement officials of travel plans. Arrange for extra surveillance of the house during vacation time.
- do not announce travel plans in public or in the local newspapers.

Put I.D. Numbers on Valuables

The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation and the Oklahoma Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association are cooperating with law enforcement agencies across the nation in a property identification program. By using the standard system for marking valuables, property recovered by police anywhere in the nation can be traced to the rightful owner.

To participate in the I.D. system, contact the county sheriff in order to be assigned a property identification number. The number will be assigned to no one else, and only you and the local law enforcement personnel will have access to the number.

The identification number consists of ten letters and numbers arranged to tell law enforcement officers the state, county, and person to whom the property belongs. For example, property belonging to John Doe of Woodward County would be identified by an I.D. number such as "OK0770306D." The letters OK designate the State of Oklahoma, 077 designates the 77th county in Oklahoma (Woodward), and 0306D designates the 306th person in Woodward County to be listed in the sheriff's office with the last name beginning with the letter "D."

Once an identification number has been assigned, impact die markers or a vibrating engraver can be used to mark property. Most county sheriffs or county Farm Bureaus maintain marking kits for use at little or no charge.

As each piece of property is marked, the locations of the I.D. numbers should be listed on an inventory sheet along with the model and serial number if applicable. Be sure to store the inventory list in a safe place (preferably away from the house).

If some property is sold, the purchaser should be advised of the location(s) of the I.D. number. The new owner should place his/her identification number below the existing number. Equipment can then be traced from one owner to another.

When moving permanently to a new county, the sheriffs of both counties should be notified. The sheriff in the first county will forward the I.D. number to the new location as well as maintain the number in his files.

Advertise I.D. System Participation

Since the primary objective of the property identification program is to prevent theft, property owners should announce

to potential burglars that property is marked with numbers the police can trace. Small vinyl decals are available at little cost which may be placed in the corner of windows. Check with the county sheriff or Farm Bureau on how to obtain the decals.

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