



OFFICE OF

**Phil Camus, Constable Precinct 5**

HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

## **HOME SECURITY**

### **DOORS AND FRAMES**

All exterior doors should be either metal or solid core wood and should be at least 1 3/8 inches thick. Hollow core and panel doors do not provide the security of a solid core door and should not be used on the exterior of your home.

Never open the door to anyone unless you know them. A simple, inexpensive safety device is the one way, wide angle door viewer. For your personal protection, all exterior entry doors should be equipped with a wide angle door viewer of 190 degrees or more. This will allow you the ability to see who is at your door without unlocking it. Door chains or other similar devices do not offer you adequate protection against an intruder.

Door frames often provide little protection against a pry bar. Most door hinges and dead bolts lock strike plates are fastened to the door jamb with 1/2 inch screws, and many times, the door jamb.

### **LOCKS**

The most important thing to remember about locks is to use them every time you leave the house, even if for just a few minutes during the day. The most popular times for residential burglaries are weekday daylight hours. In over 1/3 of burglaries, there is no forcible entry. In those cases, someone simply left a door or window unlocked and in essence, invited the burglar in. And good locks are no protection if you leave extra keys in obvious places like under the doormat or in flower pots.

The majority of all doors are equipped with a standard entrance latched (also called a spring latch or key-in-the-knob latch). These devices do not provide adequate security. They have a spring which holds a latch in place.

They can be defeated by wrenching the knob with a large pair of pliers, by sliding a credit card between the door and the frame, by kicking the door or by spreading the frame with the pry bar. These types of latches should never be depended upon alone to secure your exterior doors.



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The single cylinder dead bolt is the key operated from the outside only. The interior operation is a thumb knob. This lock is best utilized where there is no glass in the door or within 40 inches of the lock mechanism. When purchasing a dead bolt lock it is important that the lock has a bolt, which is constructed of case hardened steel and that it extends a full one inch out and locks into place. When fully extended, the bolt should not be able to be pushed back in by hand. Also, it is important that the hole in the door frame is sufficient depth to allow the bolt to be open the full one inch, otherwise it cannot lock in place and can be pushed back with a knife or screwdriver.

Double cylinder dead bolt lock is key operated from both the inside and outside. It should be used on the doors where there is breakable glass in the door or within 40 inches of the locking mechanism. This makes it impossible for the burglar to break the glass and reach inside to unlock the door.

For security reasons, you should not leave a key inserted in the inside portion of the double cylinder lock. But at the same time, you should understand that without proper preparation, a double cylinder deadbolt can become a fire trap. In addition to keys kept on your family's key chains an extra should be kept close to the door (taped under a coffee table or stair banister, etc.) where every member of the family knows its location and can easily access it in case of an emergency. You should weigh the importance of your family's safety in a fire or other emergency before deciding to use double cylinder deadbolt locks.

Sliding glass patio doors can be among the easiest entry points for burglars. Special locks are available to secure the door against lifting and prying. Installing a "Charlie bar" can help keep the sliding door from being pried open. A cheaper Charlie bar can be constructed using an old broom handle or other wooden stick. It should be cut to the exact length of the exposed door track and placed so that the door cannot be opened when forced.

To prevent the sliding glass door from being lifted out of its tracks it should be pinned. This can be accomplished by purchasing a specially designed door pin, or by drilling a hole in the door frame and inserting a nail.

Windows can also be prevented from being pried open by pinning them in the same manner. Drill a small downward sloping hole into the sliding portion of the window and into the frame of the fixed or stationary part of the window. You can then insert a nail or pin to help prevent the window from being pried open.



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If you do not want to drill a hole in your window, a track lock is available that will fit any type of aluminum window. The lock features a thumb screw which clamps down on the track and prevents the windows from being pried open. This type of lock allows you to open the window for ventilation without compromising security. These track locks can be purchased at any hardware store.

### **EXTERIOR SECURITY**

A very important consideration in securing your home is to make sure that the exterior is uninviting to a burglar. Prune back shrubbery that hides the doors and windows or if a burglar could conceal himself behind them. Cut back any tree limbs that a burglar could reach an upstairs window from.

Keep your yard well maintained. This gives the appearance that you care about your home and have taken steps to protect it. Store ladders and tools inside of your garage or storage shed and make sure that these storage areas remain locked and well secured at all times.

Light porches, entrances and yards – front and back. Good exterior lighting is important, particularly when the yard area is obscured by trees and shrubbery, or if these are dark areas.

You can buy inexpensive timers, photoelectric cells, or motion detectors to turn lights on and off when needed clearly display house numbers so that law enforcement or other emergency responders can find your home quickly.

And help the neighborhood stay in good shape. Dark alleys, broken street lights, abandon cars, vacant buildings; graffiti, litter, and other run down areas attract crime. Work with your local government agencies and your neighbors to correct the problem and to clean up your neighborhood.

### **APARTMENTS AND CONDOMINIUMS**

People who live in condominiums or multi-units buildings have special security considerations, particularly since there are many people coming and going much of the time. And many times it is difficult to get to know your neighbors because of the population of multi-unit buildings is transient or live at the property a short time before moving elsewhere. Another consideration is that you must go through the Management Company, or landlord to make security improvements.



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Some of the things that you may want to consider when living in a multi-unit building or complex is whether the landlord has taken steps to ensure your protection. Many of these precautions are dictated by state law, especially in Texas.

Does your entry door have a strong deadbolt lock and peephole? Is there a keyless deadbolt which allows you to lock you to lock the door while inside of your apartment? Does the sliding glass door have a wooden dowel in the track so that it can't be opened and pins in the frame to prevent it from being lifted out? Does the landlord or building manger have strict control over keys, and are apartments re-keyed after someone moves out?

You should also check out your building and see if there is some control over who enters and leaves the building. Are walkways, entrances, parking areas, hallways, stairways, laundry rooms and storage areas well lighted 24 hours a day? Are mailboxes in a well traveled well lighted area and do they have good locks? Is the property well maintained, are brunt out lights fixed properly, shrubs trimmed and trash removed in a timely manner?

And you also need to know your neighbors. Get to know who they are. Join or organize an Apartment Watch group so you and your neighbors can look out for and help each other. Work with the landlords or building manager to sponsor social events for tenants. Look beyond problems to root causes--does your building need a better playground, a social evening for teens, a tenant association, new landscaping, a basketball court? Work with the management for changes that make everyone proud of they live.

### **HOME SECURITY WHEN YOUR'E NOT HOME**

Most burglars prefer to break into your house when no one is home. Therefore anything you can do to make your house appear occupied will discourage burglars from picking your house as their target. Fortunately, it is relatively simple to make your house appear occupied. Don't leave obvious clues that you are gone. Don't leave notes on the door advertising that you are gone are will be returning at a specific date and time. Make sure that someone picks up the newspapers or deliveries. It is best not to cancel any mail or newspaper deliveries because that is letting someone know that you will be gone.



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Have a neighbor or friend that you trust look after your house while you are gone or perhaps even house. Have them change the drapes or blinds around to appear as if someone is home. Have a neighbor park their car in your driveway and to move it around occasionally. You can also have your neighbor put their garbage out in front of your house. And if you are going to be gone for an extended period of time, have someone scheduled to mow your lawn for you.

While it is important for some people to know you will be gone, don't tell everyone. The fewer people that know you will be gone, the better. And make sure that you leave a TV or radio on, and have several lamps placed on automatic timers.

## **OPERATION ID**

Operation identification is the name given to a nationwide program of marking personal property indelibly with a unique number which acts as a means of discouraging burglary and thefts. Operation ID also permits positive identification of the items if lost or stolen. In communities where it has been properly implemented, the program has shown dramatic results in its ability to reduce burglaries and thefts.

The greatest benefit is that it acts as a deterrent. Without identifying numbers, the stolen property can be sold to pawnshops, flea markets, fences, and even on the streets to other criminals. Burglars know that it is many times impossible to dispose of stolen property that is properly marked. It increases the burglar's chance of discovery and ultimate apprehension. On the other hand, many law enforcement agencies have property rooms full of stolen property that they are unable to return to the rightful owner because there are no identifying numbers or the owner did not know the serial number of the item and therefore it cannot be traced. Operation Identification is compressed or three parts:

Make a list of all your valuables and keep a copy in a safe place. If you should ever become a victim of a burglary or a theft you will be able to quickly describe the stolen property from the list. Be sure to include the brand name of the item, the model number, and the serial number.

This information is important so that the officer who takes the report can enter your stolen items into the National Crime Information Center computer. Property entered into the NCIC computer can be recovered as far away as Seattle Washington if an officer in that state runs the serial number.



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Engrave numbers on the items. DO NOT use your Social Security number.  
Engrave your Drivers license number onto the item  
Preceded by the two letter abbreviation for the state, i.e.: TEXAS = TX. The eight digit number should then be followed by DL if you have a driver's license or ID if your cards are an identification card issued by the State. When you are through your number should look like this.

**TX12345678DL.**

Be sure and engrave the number somewhere it cannot be altered or dismantled from the item. It is a good ideal to mark the item in two places.

First, where it can be easily seen by looking at the item. Second, somewhere such as the bottom or inside of the case where the burglar cannot not easily see it. That way if the first number is somehow removed you will still be able to identify your property. Make sure that you indicate in your inventory where you marked the item. Place a small Operation ID sticker next to the first number to let everyone know that the item has been marked.

Photograph each one of your valuables, especially if the item is hard to describe or cannot be engraved, such as custom jewelry. Insurance companies encourage individuals to photograph or video all of their insured possessions. This makes filing a claim easier and quicker because you have proof of ownership. But even better is that law enforcement officers have a better chance of identifying your property.

Remember that it in order for Operation Identification to work as a deterrent to a crime the burglar must be aware that you have taken steps to mark your property. Place an Operation Identification label on each door and window to show that you are participating in Operation ID.

Electric engravers can be purchased at any hardware store for less than \$20.00.



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## **NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH**

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention activity that enlists the active participation of citizens in cooperation with law enforcement to reduce crime in their communities. It involves

Neighbors getting to know each other, taking the time to care about each other, and working together in a program of mutual assistance.

Citizens being trained to recognize and report suspicious activities in their neighborhoods.

Crime prevention strategies such as home security, Operation ID, and other programs being implemented by citizens.

Neighborhood Watch was created to obtain citizen involvement discouraging and preventing residential crime. Neighborhood Watch programs are not designed as substitutes for police protection, rather they supplement police activities by providing extra eyes and ears. When neighbors know each other personally, they are more aware of each other's habits and routines. This awareness in turn makes them more observant of such activities which are suspicious or out of place like strange cars in the neighborhood or suspicious persons who are at your house while you are away.

The participants make their neighborhood a safer place to live by becoming more active and involved in their neighborhood activities. As a result, they become more aware of problems when they occur. This will not take a lot of time and soon will develop into a daily routine of watching out for what goes on in your neighborhood.

Neighborhood Watch programs help to create an identity within the neighborhood, which in turn fosters a sense of pride and belonging for the participants. Neighborhood Watch operates to educate participants in the principles of deterrence, delay, and detection. The program depends on a communications network organized within three levels of participants: the residents block captains, and representatives from the Travis County Sheriff's Office Community Services Unit. Reduction in burglary is likely because it is a well-publicized program of prevention and target hardening coupled with citizen concern for the safety and security of the neighborhood.



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Talk with your neighbors and friends. Explain that you would like to start a Neighborhood Watch group and ask them to participate, to take the first steps in starting a Neighborhood Watch program.

Discuss crime problems in your area. Community Services Unit officers can assist you in determining the extent of the crime problem and provide you with information on specific crime statistics for your neighborhood. Briefly explain the value of the Neighborhood Watch program and its potential impact on local crime.

Unless Neighborhood Watch organizations continue to pursue worthy goals they will eventually stagnate and die. Keeping neighbors united in a general effort to improve their common environment is the most affective and worthwhile way to avoid the onset of apathy. Remember that a neighborhood's very appearance immediately signals to prospective intruders whether or not its' residences are easy targets.

Getting involved in other projects such as improving sidewalks, fences, landscaping, security lighting, and the appearance of homes and lots gives neighbors a sense of accomplishment and pride in their community. At the same time it sends a message to criminals that the citizens care about themselves and their homes. And expanding the group's purpose to include training in fire prevention, first aid, personal safety, and health is a productive way to keep it active.

## **SECURITY ALARM SYSTEM**

Installing alarm and electronic security system in your home or business is an added defense against intruders. People who live alone, or who are away from home for long periods of time should consider the addition of a security system. Also if you have a large amount of valuable items in your home, or if you live in isolated area, the installation of an electronic system may be a wise investment.

A security alarm can act as a deterrent to burglaries and theft because the common burglar would not want to waste time trying to defeat a burglar alarm. Besides, the sounds of an alarm going off would scare off the burglar before he was able to complete his crime.





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Insurance companies routinely offer premium discount to homeowners who have installed alarm systems meeting certain guidelines. Those guidelines are available from any law enforcement agency, the Texas Department of Insurance, or your insurance agent.

You get what you pay for. Quality equipment and service will not necessarily come cheap. Also, no matter how good the system is, it must be installed properly by competent installation personnel to be effective. And also remember that no system is completely foolproof. Some burglars are so quick that they can break into a home and be gone with thousands of dollars in merchandise in a matter of minutes, before the police can arrive. And some burglars have been known to defeat some burglar alarms, by cutting the power supply or phone line. Be sure to ask the alarm company about what features are available that can ensure that this does not happen.

## **AUTO THEFT**

A vehicle is stolen every 19 seconds in the United States and in recent years, over 1,600,000 vehicles were stolen. Stolen cars, vans trucks, and motorcycles cause economic hardship for victims, increases premiums, and may be used to commit other violent crimes. Everyday, cars and trucks are stolen from malls, streets, driveways, parking lots and garages, and dealerships. Vehicle theft can happen anyplace and at anytime. A few common sense steps can help you avoid being a victim of the nation's fastest growing property crime.

Never leave your car running unattended.

Never leave your keys in the car or ignition.

Never leave valuables in plain view, even if your car is locked. Put them in the trunk out of sight.

Install a mechanical device that locks to the steering wheel, column, or brake to prevent the wheel from being turned more that a few degrees. Commonly called clubs, collars, or J-bars, these devices can act as a deterrent if installed properly. Investigate the purchase of an auto security system if you live in a high-theft area or drive a theft prone vehicle.



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If you park in a commercial garage or lot, leave only the ignition key with the attendant. Make sure no identifying information is attached. Do the same when you take your car for repairs.

Carry your registration and insurance card with you. Don't leave personal identification documents or credit cards in your vehicle.

Copy your license plate and vehicle identification (VIN) numbers on a card and keep them with your driver's license. If your vehicle is stolen, the police will need this information promptly.

## **CARJACKING**

Carjacking – stealing a car by force- has captured headlines across the country. Statistically, your chances of being a carjacking victim are very slim, and preventative actions can reduce the risk even more.

If the carjacker has a weapon, give up your car with no questions asked. Your life is worth more than your car.

Keep your car doors locked and windows closed at all times while you are in your vehicle.

Be especially alert at gas stations, shopping malls, convenience and grocery stores, and intersections. These are all likely spots for carjackers.

Park in well- lighted areas with good visibility, close to walkways, stores and people.

Approach your car with keys in your hand. Look around before getting in, especially underneath the car. And make sure there is no one hiding inside of the car before entering it.

If your car is stolen, report it to the police immediately. The sooner the police are notified, the better your chances of recovering your vehicle.



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## **H.E.A.T.**

Texas H.E.A.T. (Help end Auto Theft) is a voluntary statewide vehicle registration program designed as a theft deterrent. Vehicle owners can sign an agreement with their local participating law enforcement agency that their vehicle is normally used between 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. The agreement gives blanket authorization to any law enforcement officer in Texas to stop the registered vehicle anytime it is seen being operated within the prescribed time frame, and to verify ownership by the vehicle operator. Vehicle owners can also grant additional authority at the time of registration to have their vehicle stopped anytime of day it is being driven from Texas into Mexico.