
The Belleville Beat

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From the Desk of Sgt. Don Sax

The Belleville Beat for February 2005 discusses burglaries and ways to protect yourself.

Who are burglars?

The Sneak Thief:

The Sneak Thief is responsible for the majority of the burglaries committed. He steals for money to support a drug or gambling habit. He steals to provide income for some venture -- -- could be as simple as a need for spending money. He's a teenager and steals to become a member of a certain group, to demonstrate courage, to get attention, or for entertainment. He steals to experience the euphoria gained from a successful burglary. He steals as a way of life learned while growing up.

The Sneak Thief likes to avoid being detected when breaking in. The crime of burglary is his crime of choice because he can enter an unoccupied home, will probably go unnoticed by neighbors and others in the neighborhood, and have time to pilfer the residence selecting what he wants to take. Most Sneak Thieves strike during the daytime and morning hours. He will usually knock on the front door. If the door is answered, he will make up a story that sounds legitimate, "I served in the Gulf War. My friend, Joe Smith, gave me this address. Is Joe at home?" And the burglar will then excuse himself and leave the intended victim unaware of the motivation behind his call. If no one answers the door after several minutes of healthy knocking, the burglar will enter the home. He gains entry through several methods:

- He will go the side or the rear of the home, remove the window screen of an unlocked or open window and crawl through the window.
- If the windows are locked, he will break the window, unlock it and crawl through. Windows can be broken in such a way that the noise goes unnoticed. He can place masking or duct tape on the window before smashing and the sound level will be greatly reduced.
- He will lift the rear sliding door off of the track or pry the lock and enter.
- He will channel-lock the front door. He drills through the lock and opens the door in seconds. Double cylinder locks make it more difficult.
- He might smash a window located next to the door lock, reach in, unlock and open the door.

When the Sneak Thief is in your fenced rear or side yard, he is usually unnoticed by your neighbors. Homes with corner lots or an alley to the rear are victimized more often than those located between two homes. The alley and corner lot allows an easier and more discrete access to the rear.

He'll put his loot in your pillowcases, wrap it up in your bed sheets, dump it in your suitcases and take it with him from your home. Often your valuables are damaged, and sometimes he will stash it in nearby shrubbery until nightfall. When you are asleep, he will return and claim your property unnoticed.

The Sneak Thief will cover his hands with gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints. But chances are that even if fingerprints are left behind, the burglar will not be apprehended. And even if the Sneak Thief is caught, you probably won't get your things back in the condition they were stolen. In fact, you have a better chance of winning the lottery than recovering your stolen valuables. If he's apprehended, the thief has long ago disposed of your things. If the police arrive on the scene during the burglary, there is a good chance your property will stay intact and the loss will be small or none.

The Confrontive & Combative Thief:

You need to understand that criminalists have for ages classified the type of crime perpetrated with a personality profile. While most burglars enjoy committing their crimes unnoticed, not all burglars fit this description.

The Home Invader:

The Home Invader is often very aggressive, confronts the victim and uses force or fear to get what he wants. He'll put a gun to your head, for example. These crimes are usually reclassified as armed robberies. Nevertheless, they occur when the victims are at home. Many times, the burglar will enter late at night or early in the morning to catch you off-guard and asleep.

The Rapist:

This criminal has a psychological disorder. He preys on women who are alone in their homes. He usually strikes at night and doesn't want to be seen by witnesses or victims. Some Rapists are very gentle and others can be very violent. He may command sexual acts ranging from simple intercourse rape to very deviant acts that demean the victim. Some victims never recover psychologically. Many of these criminals repeat their crime over and over. They are not deterred by spending time in prison. Psychologists state that many times this type of crook's intensity grows until the victims are not only sexually assaulted but they are murdered as well.

The Psychotic Burglar:

This type of burglar can be very dangerous. Research shows that the Psychotic Burglar does not care what he steals, who he injures, who he sexually assaults or who he murders. He only cares that he gets what he wanted. And he would kill for a \$10 bill. Often the Psychotic Burglar is brilliant, cunning and does not value his own life. He may not run even when the police arrive. He would rather confront or kill the police. Fortunately, the Psychotic Burglar is the minority.

The judicial system is not always effective in protecting us. We, you and I, must watch out for ourselves, our families and our property or be relegated to the status of just another victim. The police files are overflowing with cases of "just another victim." Your loss, your pain and suffering fall into another sterile report. And your report will be filed amongst many that will never be viewed again. Your stolen

property and traumatized loved ones become just another victim to line the overflowing archives of statistics.

Unfortunately, law enforcement can't do everything to protect you. Because money is limited and most police departments are understaffed police officers spend their time investigating people crimes. Property crimes are ignored, for the most part. If your home gets broken into, the burglar probably won't get caught, and you'll never see your stuff again. That's why it's up to YOU to protect yourself.

Our society hardly blinks when a crime has been committed. To commit a burglary is as common as taking a morning shower -- it's a way of life. "The have nots take from the careless have got's," is a familiar adage. Carelessness and greed are the ingredients responsible for our losses.

You must harden the target to avoid being a victim. The harder you make it for burglars to break-in, steal and escape undetected, the less likely they are to consider your home as a target. Every house in every neighborhood is a target. The best way to protect your family and those things that are precious to you is to understand how a burglar works and then take action to keep him out.

Case your place. Try to look at your home as a burglar would. How would he get in without being seen, heard or discovered? He will try to make himself look like he belongs there. He'll come to your home when you're not there. And he'll probably try to break in at the back of your house.

Time, light and noise are the burglar's three worst enemies.

These tips are intended to slow them down, make them visible and alert your neighbors and the police to their whereabouts. If they see evidence that you've done your home security homework, it's likely they won't even come near.

Protect your self. Burglars are paranoid. If he thinks that someone has noticed him perpetrating a burglary, he will quickly abandon the area. It makes sense to install and maintain an audible burglar alarm. Sometimes the neighbors will hear your alarm, but fail to call the police. If your alarm is monitored, the authorities are notified and will check out your home. Monitoring increases the chances that the police might catch the thief in the act and recover your property.

Burglar Alarms and Monitoring:

Before investing in a burglar alarm security system, look for a reputable company and check references. Burglar alarms are no longer an expensive item. You don't have to buy a hard-wired system. And, effective alarm monitoring can protect you for less than what you pay for your cable bill. Only alarm monitoring will make sure the police are called when your alarm goes off.

When you start your research, you'll find that you aren't limited to expensive systems installed by people you don't know. There are excellent self-installed, easy-to-operate systems available on the market. Your alarm system should include:

- Door and window sensors: Magnetic sensors that automatically sound the alarm and call the monitoring service when an intruder opens a door or window.
- Interior sensors: Motion detectors that protect the main areas of your home by sensing if an intruder passes through.
- Alarms/Sirens: Noise is one of the burglar's greatest enemies. A well-placed and loud siren will help get the intruder out as soon as possible and alert your neighbors. The faster he gets out, the less time he will have to look for your valuables.

- Panic buttons: They activate a call to the monitoring service for help in an emergency. They can be installed in a permanent location or worn as a pendant.
- 24-hour monitoring and rapid response: In the event of an alarm, the monitoring service will automatically call your home. If no one answers, or the wrong password is given, the police dispatch will be contacted immediately.

Special Notes:

- You'll want to put the alarm box, with the glowing red light, where it can be seen from outside.
- Take time to understand your alarm so it operates only when you've activated it.
- Your security system is only part of the solution.
- A total home protection plan is only as strong as its weakest point.

Doors:

A burglar will look for the most discrete way to get in.

- Exterior doors: Install deadbolt locks on every exterior door. The bolt should be a minimum of 1 - 1 1/2" long. Deadbolts are far and away the toughest lock. They're called "dead" because they can't be moved with a card or pick tool.
- Sliding glass doors: Secure sliding glass doors and windows with a wooden dowel in the track. Install a sliding pin lock that goes through the frame of both doors. This prevents them from being lifted off their tracks.
- Garage doors: Lock your garage door and side garage door even when you're in the back yard. Your tools are valuable to a thief.

Special Notes:

- Put peepholes on entry doors so you can see who's there without opening the door.
- Replace your chain locks with deadbolts. Deadbolts are the most substantial way to secure your doors.
- Don't hide keys to your locks on or around your home.
- Never have your name or address on your key chains.

Good locks: Have them and USE them even when going around the street or around the block.

Windows:

- Always have locks or removable pins on every window. There are simple yet functional commercial locks mechanisms for every type of window.
- Ground level windows: These are especially vulnerable to entry and a perfect place to be protected by the window sensors of your security system.

Special Notes:

- Place burglar alarm system warning decals in the most visible places on windows.
- If they know you're serious about crime prevention, they'll go find an easier target.
- Keep enticing items out of view. Intruders look for big trees, uncontrolled bushes and darkness so they can break in without being noticed.

House Exterior and Yard:

To keep intruders from hiding while they work, trim bushes and trees away from doors and windows. Trim tree limbs away from windows where they could be used to climb to a higher point of entry. Lock tools and ladders away when not in use.

Special Notes:

- Post "Beware of Dog" signs, whether or not you have one.
- Post yard signs indicating you have a monitored security system in place.
- Paint or buy large easy-to-read house numbers and make them visible from the street, so emergency vehicles can locate you quickly.

Lighting:

- Turn outside lights on after dark near doors, on porches and in your yard, front and back. Make sure they're off during the day. That's a dead giveaway you're not at home.
- Get motion activated floodlights from the company that sold you your alarm system. Bright lights welcome guests and repel intruders.
- Attach inside lights to timers. Set them to go off at different times. Change the settings periodically. Bathroom lights on at nighttime will scare off more burglars than lights anywhere else in the house!

Personal Property:

- List and photograph (videotaping works great too) all valuables including jewelry, VCRs, stereos, TVs, cameras and computers. The lists need to include serial numbers and a brief description.
- Keep family heirlooms, firearms, your inventory lists and other vital papers in a sturdy, fireproof safe that can't be easily removed from the house. Most burglars are not safecrackers. If there's a break-in, you'll need as much documentation as possible to obtain insurance money.
- Mark all your valuables with your driver's license number, using an electric engraver or ultra-violet light marker. Local law enforcement will give you Operation ID stickers to place on your windows.
- Forge a Neighborhood Watch Program. Organize and participate in a neighborhood watch program. They have always proven to be successful in lowering crime rates. Local police have materials to get you started.

If you're going to be gone for extended periods of time, do everything you can to give the illusion you're still at home.

Special Notes:

- Stop mail and paper delivery, or better yet, have someone you trust pick them up.
- Don't leave a phone message saying you're on vacation or you're going to be gone for a specific number of days.
- Turn your telephone ringer off or down so it can't be heard from outside.
- Turn your radio on whenever you leave the house. Put lights, radios and even TVs on timers.
- Leave window blinds or curtains the way you normally do.
- Arrange to have your yard mowed or driveway plowed if you're away for an extended time.
- Alert neighbors you trust to watch your home while you're gone.

What if I walk into a burglary?

Sometimes people return home while the burglary is in process. The thief may have barricaded the front or rear door with a piece of furniture. The thief may have parked his vehicle in your driveway. What should you do?

- Call the police on your mobile phone, if you have one.
- Block the unfamiliar vehicle in your driveway, if you can. Remove your car keys and go to a neighbor's home to call and wait for the police. Discovering this situation could be dangerous. Don't risk your life by remaining in the area if you feel threatened.
- If you have a panic alarm activator on your key ring, push the panic button. If your alarm is monitored, the police may arrive before the burglar can leave the area.
- The average family dog will not keep the burglar from breaking into your home. You may think your family dog, even a Rottweiler or a shepherd, will thwart the thief. Small dogs will bark, bark, bark and bark when someone knocks at the front door. The constant barking without the dog being silenced by the owner tells the perpetrator that you are not at home.