

Home Security D.I.Y Checklist

This Crime Prevention advice on Target Hardening is given without the intention of creating a contract. It is designed to assist you in identifying any weak areas in your home security for your information and any remedial action of your choice.

Completion of the exercise in no way implies or guarantees that you would be totally protected against a burglary at a future date.

The Principles of Target Hardening

Target hardening is a term used to describe the process of increasing the security of a property to make it more difficult to burgle, thereby increasing the effort needed by the offender to gain entry to a property. The intended outcome is ultimately to deter the offender from burgling an individual property. It is a well established strategy within the situational crime prevention literature (Clarke, 1997; Cornish and Clarke 2003)

In plain English, Target Hardening means: "Making targets more resistant to attack, less attractive to a Burglar or making it more difficult / rewarding to remove items. Think of a target, not only as your property, but as anything that an offender would want to steal.

Exercise 1

Go outside your property onto the pavement and take a long look at your household. Pretend you have locked yourself out and there is no key available, how would you get in.? No one knows your house as well as you do so, is there an insecure window around the back and is there a ladder handy for an upstairs window? (Wheelie Bins are handy to access lower windows and flat roofs). Can you get a tool from the shed to force the back door, do you have a side gate, is it locked and if so can you climb over it. Anything you can think of, so will the burglar, so now start to think how you can make it more difficult for him. You would be forgiven for only thinking about gaining entry with minimal damage, a burglar will not be so considerate.

Being hidden from view is one of the burglars first concerns. He doesn't want to be seen or more importantly, if he has been seen, is anyone calling the Police. This would play on his psychology so he would not want to be staying around for long. Tall trees and hedges may give the privacy from the outside world but it is a bonus for a burglar so you will have to make a judgement call.		
Is your front door visible from the street	Yes	No
Are there any bushes that would conceal someone trying your front Door	Yes	No
Are your windows clearly visible	Yes	No
Does your front door look robust, secure and well maintained	Yes	No
Can you see the contents of a room from the street	Yes	No
Does the overall property look well maintained	Yes	No
If there is a perimeter fence, is it sturdy and in good repair and 2 meters tall	Yes	No
Is your path / driveway of solid construction	Yes	No

Check your answers against the advice at the end of the exercises.

Exercise 2

Now move to the sides / rear of the premises and garden area. Many burglaries take place at the rear of the property by forcing rear windows or doors. So in this area we will be looking at weak areas in the building and means to break in

Preventive methods are more effective if the offender risks being caught. Anything that slows down an offender or increases the chance of detection is an effective method of prevention. This means that good Target Hardening increases the time it takes to enter a building and increases the chances of being spotted. The longer it takes to commit an offence, the more vulnerable the offender feels.		
Would it be easy for the offender to get to the rear of the property	Yes	No
Are the windows at the rear closed, lockable, secure and well maintained	Yes	No
Is the rear door of a solid construction with more than one lock	Yes	No
Are patio doors well secured, maintained and locked	Yes	No
Is there anything in the garden that could be used to smash a window or door	Yes	No
Are there dustbins etc that could be used to reach windows or flat roofs	Yes	No
If there is a shed, is it locked and secure	Yes	No
If there are tools in the shed are they also secure to prevent use	Yes	No
In the evenings, is this area in darkness if internal lights are switched off	Yes	No

Exercise 3

Having checked the outside we will now look at the inside, but from the outside. Look through the windows at the rear of the property, what can you see.		
Kitchen door and windows. Is the key visible in the lock.	Yes	No
Looking through Patio Doors can you see anything of value nearby	Yes	No
Can you see straight through the house (through Lounges etc)	Yes	No
Now return to the front of the house		
Looking through main window can you see anything of value	Yes	No
Is there a porch on your house	Yes	No
Is the front door recessed from the front of the house	Yes	No

Exercise 4

Finally, looking at the house as a whole from the outside		
Is there a flat roof that could be reached to give access to upper windows	Yes	No
Is there anything available to stand / climb on to give access	Yes	No
Are there any dark areas at the front of the house during the late evenings	Yes	No

Exercise 5

Having surveyed the outside of the house lets move indoors. We will be checking the inside of the front door first and then working through the house checking other doors and windows.		
Does the front door fit well in the frame with minimal movement (Wood / UPVC)	Yes	No
Wooden doors: is there a large gap between door edge, frame and striker plate	Yes	No
Is there a mortise lock installed in the door and do you use it	Yes	No
UPVC Doors: pulling the handle upwards. Does it feel tight and secure	Yes	No
Do you use the key to lock the handle from the inside at night	Yes	No

Do you keep car keys / door keys within view or easy reach of the letterbox	Yes	No
Is there a post basket or bristle draught excluder on the letterbox	Yes	No
Does the door open outwards	Yes	No
Are there any bolts on the doors (Front and Back doors)	Yes	No
Does the door have glazed or thin panels	Yes	No

Exercise 6

Windows: Are the frames solid and in good repair	Yes	No
Are the windows Lockable and do you have keys	Yes	No
Are the locks internal to the windows	Yes	No

Exercise 7

Do you regularly leave laptops / expensive items in plain view in the lounge	Yes	No
Do you have a safe for important documents and expensive items	Yes	No
Is the safe secured to floor / wall in a hidden location	Yes	No
Bedrooms. Do you keep valuables at the back of a draw, in a box, in wardrobe	Yes	No
Do you shut / lock upstairs windows when you are away	Yes	No
Jewellery, Is it kept in a box on display	Yes	No

Exercise 8

This last exercise is just a simple way to increase your home security and to help others

How well do you know your neighbours, How well do they know you, are they home more than you or are you home more than them. We have lost the "Neighbourhood" culture. Just being a little more approachable to your neighbours means you can support each other. I have seen neighbours of the victims of burglary, never having spoken much before, step up and be superb. Offering the victims and family somewhere to wait in the warm, something to eat, drink and most importantly support, sympathy and understanding in a safe environment. Its worth the best alarm system system in the world to have good neighbours who will watch out for you and in return you can watch out for them. Truly a win, win situation. A good neighbour is beyond value so be a good neighbour.

Advice and Recommendations

Your first observations are the same as a burglar. Looking at your property from the street he would be looking to see if he could attempt the door or gate or get over a fence. So anything that hides your front door from someone walking past would offer a prime target.

Burglars quite often will walk down a street and look into houses through the main windows, if the curtains are not shut, just to see the age of the occupants inside and what is on view. If you need convincing, just take a walk one evening down your own street and see what is on show. Usually it is the big TV sets etc. Not that he is considering removing a five foot TV from a wall but it would give an indication of the expensive technology that could also be in the house.

The condition of the exterior also gives a good idea of the occupants. Ramps, large grab handles on the outside of the door and door key safes are all installed to assist elderly residents and their careers. Not a great deal that can be done about these aids but it serves a point that their presence can give some detail as to the mobility and age of the occupant. But an unkempt garden, poorly maintained wooden window frames and more importantly a chipped, faded and a poor conditioned front door all would be considered as a possible target as it may look like it would not take much force to get past that particular barrier.

Perimeter fences and side gates are also of interest. If he can get to the rear of the property he can virtually work unobserved. Fences should be firm and well maintained to a height of 2 meters and side gates should not have sufficient space underneath to get an arm under to reach bolts. Side gates should be secured with bolts top and bottom with one or both padlocked. Fences can be improved by the addition of the floppy trellis secured along the top to deter a secure handhold and make it difficult to climb over. Likewise, if possible some bramble or rose type bushes at the base of the fence create a thorny barrier.

Gravel drives are noisy when you walk on them, very hard to creep up to a window or door without someone possibly hearing. So if you have one and are considering having a concrete replacement you may need to weigh the benefits. Although I am not advocating having yours dug up and replaced with shingle, it's just an extra deterrent if you have one.

Let us assume that the offender has gotten into your garden. Your gate and fence may well be secure but there may be access into your garden from a neighbour's garden. So check and make the necessary changes to prevent an easy access. Your neighbours, may even agree to share the cost of a decent fence between your properties.

How secure are the windows at the back of the property. They need to be lockable with a key but the key should not be left in the lock or visible from the outside. Likewise the back door should have both a centre lock and other secure points. UPVC doors can have this internally to their design but wooden doors will need to have a mortise lock and bolts top and bottom. The key for the door should not be visible from the outside but immediately visible and easily accessible from the inside. There are two very important reasons for this recommendations both concerning yours and your family's safety.

1) In the event of a fire etc. you will need to leave the building as quickly as possible. Unless you have experience of being in a smoke filled room you will not understand

how disorientating and traumatising this situation is. You will need to find the key straight away to unlock the door to get out.

2) If a burglar does manage to gain access to your property the first thing he will want to establish is how he will get away if he is disturbed. We **want** him to see the key to the back door so he can open it in preparation of his escape. Why ? Because we do not want him to be trapped inside the property should you return and the only escape route is past anyone standing in his way by the front door.

Not having it on show from the outside means he cannot pre-empt his escape route which would cause him some misgivings. Does he want to enter if he cannot see his way out?

Some of the older style sliding patio doors were just lifted up into the top runner and dropped into the bottom runner. Removing the whole door just meant lifting the door up and out of the bottom runner. There are devices available to insert above the door to prevent this but catch locks can be fixed to the door that lock into the door jamb to prevent this. More up to date doors have very secure three or five point locking systems incorporated in the design. Check what style you have.

Wheellie bins make excellent platforms to stand on the reach windows etc. If you have one, consider an anchor point to chain it to. If you have more than one, then chaining them together makes life awkward for the offender.

Garden furniture should be locked away but if a permanent fixture, then consider some form of ground anchor. Likewise statues, stone bird baths etc. can be set in a concrete base or anchored to the ground in some way. All have been used to smash patio doors. Any bricks, paving not being used should be removed and tools should not be left in the garden but secured away. Views through the house also give the burglar a preview of the layout of the house. Closing all internal doors is a recognised fire precaution but it also serves to frustrate the would be burglar because he cannot see beyond the first door so doesn't know what he might walk into.

Most budget sheds are made from flimsy wood with small screws holding the padlock staple and hasp. Wood does rot with age and the screws can rust making prising off the padlock a simple matter. Tools inside the shed should be as secure as possible, chains and padlocks though the handles and the door lock should be replaced with a bigger, robust lock, hasp and staple, which should be fixed to the door with nuts and bolts through the door and through a reinforcing piece of wood inside.

If it is dark at the rear of the premises then consider some external lighting. Just remember to point it down as far as possible to avoid shining in neighbouring buildings especially if it is movement activated. Always install any lighting high enough to prevent the burglar cutting the cable. I have heard arguments about external lighting. One, that it assists the burglar so he can see what he is doing. But the recurring theme is The Burglar does not want to be seen. However any installation needs to be done in such a way as to not keep going on and off every five minutes. In the first instance it will annoy the neighbours best placed to observe your property and they will stop looking when it comes on but, in my opinion, the burglar prefers to work in darkness and being lit up is not something he would want. We are all aware of lights coming on and off from our

neighbours and if we are honest, we don't take much notice after the first few days. The burglar knows this **BUT**, he doesn't know if someone **HAS** taken notice and is right now looking at him in the garden and is dialling the Police. I would think, at the forefront of his mind is now, How long has he got before the Police arrive. It may just be enough of a worry for him to abandon his attempt.

Porches can be a first line of defence or a big hindrance to security, it depends if it's locked or not. Locked, then the offender has to consider getting past two doors but unlocked he can shut the outer door behind him and be obscured from view whilst he works on the front door. He could even use the outside door for leverage to push the inner door open with his legs. Fully glazed porches also show mail etc on the floor, a good sign no ones home. Consider some form of opaque film to stick on lower panels. Likewise recessed front doors provide cover during the day but more importantly darkness during the evenings and at night. Some external lighting here would certainly be a deterrent.

Inside Survey

Looking at the front door from the inside, how well does it fit into the frame. UPVC doors, depending on the quality, will fit snugly and offer several locking points into the door frame to prevent levering open, lifting etc. Some are extremely effective, some designs less so. One thing that is important is that just by putting the handle up does not secure the door. It may well lock the outside handle from being used to open the door but it doesn't engage the security locks. A screwdriver forced in between the door frame and door will flex the door and the locking hook or pins will release. I have been to many burglaries where this has proved to be true. Wooden doors have their own weaknesses. The Rim Lock (Yale lock) fitted to most wooden doors is designed to keep the door shut, that's all. They are of little use against a strong shoulder, kick or leverage. The screws holding the strike plate are usually quite short and close together weakening the wood of the door frame. Usually three, one above the other and one at the rear. Simply checking these screws and replacing maximum length will add some strength. But reinforcing with a London Bar and a Birmingham Bar on the hinge side will increase the resistance overall. I would recommend the addition of a mortice lock in wooden doors but if the door is too thin then a rim Lock Night latch would be best.

Windows come in all shapes and sizes and in both UPVC, metal and wood. What they all have in common is the ability to be opened. Some windows have internal locks as part of their design feature, some handles have keys. But all windows wood, metal or UPVC can be improved with the addition of extra Casement Locks. Some of the earlier Double glazed windows put the glass in from the outside and the beading then clipped into place and secured with a rubber sealing strip. Its a simple matter to break the beading off and remove the whole pane. Screws through the beading into the frame prevents this easy removal. Just be careful not to drill into the glass unit. Some UPVC windows had a simple catch as part of the handle, sadly this was always quite thin and snaps off easily to leverage from outside.

Finally, care of your valuables. As mentioned elsewhere I have seen a very secure house, complete with burglar alarm, attacked. The burglar used a small statue in the garden and threw it through a sliding patio door. The alarm activated but all he had to do was step through the smashed window and take a laptop he could see on the table

inside. Leaving valuables on display from outside is a strong temptation. But if the burglar has already entered you need to remove any valuables from sight. Drawers, wardrobes and under the bed are the first place he will look. You may think you have found the perfect hiding place, but he's probably thought of it too. Safes are a must in my opinion this day and age to protect your most valuable item and documents. But just having a safe is only part of the solution. If he can remove it easily he can just take it away and open it at his leisure. I have been to a burglary where the owner had a small safe in his bedroom. It held a fair amount of cash but he hadn't got around to securing to the wall...So the burglar just took it. Likewise I have been to a property where they had a small safe, securely bolted to the wall at the back of a wardrobe behind the clothes, quite a reasonable disguise. Sadly, they decided the best place to keep the key, was on top of the safe. So, if you have a safe or intend to buy one, make sure its secured properly. with Redhead bolts rather than screws and rawl plugs and try to install it where the burglar cannot get any leverage behind it. Safe keys are fairly obvious in shape and design so put it somewhere in another room.

Burglar Alarms and CCTV.

Alarms and CCTV are, without doubt a deterrent, but please do not think they are the pinnacle of security. With a huge differential in cost alarms all do the same thing. They make a noise. Some are so noisy inside the house as to make it uncomfortable but mostly it is to attract attention of passers by. I have heard one Alarm Company salesman even say they alarm was monitored by the Police, here in London they certainly are not and I suspect in the rest of the Country. What happens is the alarm activates and sends a signal to an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC). They in turn contact the local Police control and the control sends a Police unit to attend. Each monitored alarm has its own URL. (Unique Resource Locator). Should they receive more than three false alarms in a rolling 12 month period that URL is withdrawn and the Police will not respond until certain remedial action has been taken by the ARC. Secondly Police require "sequential" alarms. What that means is two alarm units need to be activated showing movement through a property. This was because the high activation caused by Key holder error. Even so, with an actual activation the Police will respond ASAP. Some ARC's can notify you by mobile alert. Most alarm boxes have an activation strobe and this I have found important as it lets you know the alarm has been activated before you enter the premises. You have the opportunity to call the Police and they will attend to escort you in. But go back to the basic benefit of an alarm system. To make a noise and to attract the attention of passers by. The burglar does not want to be seen and people will look at a house in alarm. If you are considering a system then firstly work out what it is you need to achieve to restore your peace of mind. There are wireless alarms at most big DIY stores that allow you to add units to the system as and when you need. No cable or technical knowledge required. One word of warning, like the outside lights, if your alarm constantly goes off because you have left a window open, the cat / dog wandering around etc. then the neighbours will just not bother to check.

CCTV

Another good deterrent, but don't get your hopes up. It will show a burglar entering your house... but you will already have found that out. But at least you will know day, date and time which would help the Police in their investigation. However for identification purposes they are very limited. Most burglars these days wear gloves and pull hoodies

up tight and keep their heads down to prevent having their faces recorded. The cameras have to be too high to allow interference and the cable also has to be out of reach of a pair of cutters or a knife. Putting them up high means you can only see the top of their heads. But.... still a deterrent if used correctly but as the previous recommendations have illustrated there is an awful lot you can do to Target Harden your property. Just try to be more Security aware.

I hope you have found this exercise informative and worthwhile. Houses are as individual as the people who live in them. Flats, Maisonettes, Tower blocks, Detached, Semi detached and Terraced properties each have their own unique strengths and inherent weaknesses and it would be impossible to try to explain various scenarios and eventualities. This is just an overview of the most common reasons, attractions and entry methods used by Burglars.

Home Security Workbook

We will soon be offering a Home Security Survey workbook that will cover similar areas as above but will go into greater depth and DIY projects to secure you property and save you money with illustrations of the various security additions you can make around your own home.

Home Security Surveys

We will soon be offering a personal Home Survey followed by a full written report of the problems, weaknesses and recommendations on how to improve each area. The report will allow you to make the necessary improvements to reduce the attractiveness of your property, frustrate attempts to enter and how to reduce their pay-off making breaking in a bad decision.