

Personal Disaster Preparedness

By Dan Merckling

When we think of disaster preparedness, we think of big things – earthquakes, floods, tornados, etc. But disaster can be a personal thing, too – totaling your car, losing your job, being diagnosed with cancer. One of the personal disasters that few of us think about in our quiet suburban oasis of Syracuse is home invasion, aka burglary, because “we’re not that kind of area”. Did you know that since 2018, there have been 88 residential burglaries reported in Syracuse?

This article will list only a few small things that you can do to make your home a little safer and less inviting to the “bad guys” and hopefully prevent this personal disaster.

1. Deter

- a. Make it look like someone is home
This is especially true at night. You should have lights over the front, back, and garage doors. Burglars do not like to be seen. They like homes that are dark. This is a simple and inexpensive step to deter a burglar. A 60-watt bulb turned on for eight hours per night would cost you a whopping \$2.16 per year.
- b. Make your life seem unpredictable
Bad guys don’t like unpredictable events. Kids’ toys on the front lawn or dogs in the backyard will encourage the burglars to find an easier target. If you don’t have kids or dogs at home, lean a used skateboard next to your front door and put up a couple of “Beware Of Dog” signs.
- c. Give the illusion of robust security
Many people today have a home security system. But if you don’t have one, you can still get the signs and window decals that say you do. If the burglar thinks you’ve got a security system, they’ll go elsewhere with easier pickings.

2. Detect

- a. Get a security system
Today, home security systems are readily available, fairly inexpensive, and the technology is pretty high quality. Place the cameras where they will get the highest quality images. You don’t want your camera pointed right into the rising or setting sun or getting a panoramic view of your living room. You want to place the cameras where the perpetrator will be easily identified in the pictures.
- b. Talk to your neighbors
The old-fashioned idea of watching out for each other is one of the best ways to detect things that should not be happening. If you and your neighbors are at least familiar with each other – what the work and school schedules are, when someone’s gone on vacation, etc. – then something that doesn’t look right could prompt a quick call to that neighbor or 911. “It takes a village”

3. Deny

- a. Keep your garage door down and keep the garage pedestrian door locked
Most burglars know that the garage is the best and easiest way into your home. Even if your car is parked in the garage, don't leave valuables – keys, wallet, purse, cell phones, computers – in the car. If the burglar gets into your garage, he is going to take everything in your car.
- b. Cut off or tie up the garage door opener release handle
It's very easy for a burglar to reach in with a coat hanger, yank on the garage door release cable and be inside your garage in a few seconds. Then he has full access to your home and nobody knows he's in there.
- c. Get a solid core or aluminum door
This is not a cheap fix. However, if your home exterior doors need to be upgraded, this is an effective way to slow down or prevent a break-in.
- d. Reinforce all exterior door frames with 3 1/2 inch deck screws
This is a very inexpensive fix, but it makes your doors much more difficult to break into for the bad guys. Normal door hardware is mounted using 1/2 inch screws that barely go into the door frame trim. Replacing them with the long deck screws anchors your door into the heavy studs of the door frame. By adding the deck screws about every 8 inches all the way up and down the locking side of the door frame, you've just made it very difficult to kick in. Depending on his strength, the burglar will now require 5-10 heavy kicks to break down your door and that gives you extra time to escape or defend yourself. This tip will take about \$5-10 worth of deck screws, but it will significantly improve your home's safety.
- e. Install protective window film
You can put hurricane film on your windows to make them virtually unbreakable. Hurricane film is like the "clear bra" film that people put on the front of their car's hood to protect from flying road debris. While this doesn't make your windows bulletproof, it does make them much, much harder to break.

Hopefully, these tips have provided you with some ideas on how to fortify your home against one of the most disturbing personal disasters – home invasion or burglary.