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Home Security

Exterior doors must be solidly constructed. At a minimum, use solid core hardwood doors designed for exterior use. For greater protection at greater cost, high security steel doors are available. Remember that an entrance door can never be stronger than its weakest point, so make sure that the door frame, hinges, lock and striker plate are as secure as the door itself. And don't forget the mail slot. Make sure that the mail slot cannot be used to look into your home. Hoods are available for mail slots that prevent this.

Weak hinges defeat strong doors. Hinges are often the Achilles' Heel of an entrance door. If the door opens outward, as many do, the hinges will be on the outside. It only takes a moment to remove the hinge pins from any ordinary set of hinges. With the pins removed, the door can be removed, making its strength and the security of its lock irrelevant. There are three ways to avoid this:

1. Replace the hinges with a set of hinges that do not have pins.
2. Make removable pins permanent, either by welding or by drilling and pinning the hinge pins themselves so that they cannot be easily removed.
3. Install high security hinges that include a pin that extends from one side of the hinge into a hole on the other side when the door is closed. Even if the hinge pins themselves are removed, the door cannot be opened because of the steel pin that extends from the edge of the hinge side of the door into the door frame itself. A similar result can be achieved by modifying ordinary hinges. First, remove the center screw on the door side of the hinge. Then replace it with either a pin or a longer screw that will extend into a hole drilled into the other side of the door and the door frame.

Door locks and deadbolts. Without an effective lock, none of the above measures will prevent entry. Least effective is the common key-in-knob type. Little better than no lock at all, this type of lock can be broken easily with a tool no more sophisticated than ordinary adjustable pliers. Equally useless are locks with bolts that can be defeated with a plastic credit card.

At minimum, the lock on an entrance door should be a pin tumbler type with at least five tumblers. To determine the number of tumblers on your lock, examine the key. Each depression corresponds to a tumbler; look for at least five depressions. Even better than the ordinary pin tumbler locks are high security designs such as the Medeco, which are much more difficult to pick, even for a professional locksmith. Most burglars, however, don't have the know-how, time, or inclination to pick a lock. It is far easier to move on to a more vulnerable target.

Beefing up Sliding Doors. Sliding doors are especially vulnerable to forcible entry. For one thing, the latching mechanism on most doors of this type is not very sturdy and can be easily forced open with a pry bar or other lever. For another, it is often possible to lift a sliding door out of its track, then pull it outward and remove it completely. Of course, the glass itself is vulnerable, but the noise of breaking glass is likely to attract unwelcome attention to the burglar.

There are a number of things that can be done to increase the security of a sliding glass door. To prevent an intruder from lifting the door out of its track, install pan-head sheet metal screws in the track directly above the door. The screws should protrude just enough to serve as a stop if anyone attempts to lift the door, but not enough to interfere with the sliding motion of the door.

To prevent the intruder from simply forcing the door and breaking the lock, there are a number of preventative measures you can take. Cut a length of broom handle or heavy dowel to length and use it to fill the track in which the inner door slides. There are also commercial products that can be attached to the door that serve the same function.

Stronger locks than the latches supplied on most sliding doors are also available. Or, simplest of all, just drill a hole through the inner door that passes halfway into the outer door and install a screw or steel rod into the hole. The two doors will be locked together, making it nearly impossible to force the door without breaking it and also making it much more

difficult to lift the door off the track, since both door must now be lifted at the same time.

Window Security Securing Sliding Windows. Similar solutions can be used to make sliding windows more secure. Security of most window types can be beefed-up considerably. The one exception is the jalousie, or louver-type windows, which are particularly vulnerable, because all the thief has to do to gain entry is break one pane, then reach in to crank open the window. Once open, the remaining panes can usually be removed easily.

Jalousie and Casement windows. Short of installing bars or a security grate, there is nothing you can do to make jalousie windows truly safe. You can make the thief's job more difficult by cementing the panes into their frames with two-part epoxy resin. Casement windows, similar in some respects to jalousies, are much safer because the panes are completely enclosed in metal frames.

Double-Hung Windows. The most common window type, double-hung sash, is the simplest to make secure. if you do not need or want to open the window, you can simply fasten one section of the sash to the other using a long screw. Otherwise most hardware stores can supply devices which, mounted to the upper sash, restrict window opening to a few inches. Or, at a slightly greater cost, locks can be installed on this type of window.

Securing Other Entrances While securing your windows, don't forget various other openings that may allow unauthorized access to your home. These include pet access doors and entrances to crawlspaces, sub floor areas and so forth.

Interior Security & Other Household Security Measures

Safes and Security Closets Things of value that you must keep in the house, as well as things that should not be allowed to fall into the wrong hands (such as firearms), can be kept in a security closet. This is a closet that has a steel or solid wood door and gives the same attention to security that you give the entrance to your home. These may also be protected separately as part of a home security system.

Safe Deposit Boxes & Household Records No matter how secure your home is, it is no place for your most important papers and valuables. A safe deposit box costs only a few dollars a year and affords more protection than you could buy at home without spending many thousands of dollars. The lock box is the place to store records of the serial numbers of valuables, with photos and descriptions of items that have no serial numbers.

Engraving and Recording Possessions When taking photos of your valuables, it is a good idea to have your driver's license in the photo as evidence of ownership. Wherever possible, it is a good practice to engrave your driver's license number (preceded by the two letter abbreviation of the state). The best way to do this is with one of the small electric engravers that sell for between \$15 and \$20. Many police departments will lend you one of these devices at no cost whatsoever.

Setting Up a Neighborhood Watch Setting up a good Neighborhood Watch program is the best investment you can make in keeping your local neighborhood safe. The roots of the program lie in what we think of as old-fashioned ideas of neighborhood responsibility, unity and **preparedness**.