



How to Secure Your Home

Burglars often take advantage of lax security to break into homes

This booklet contains advice on how to safeguard your house against burglary

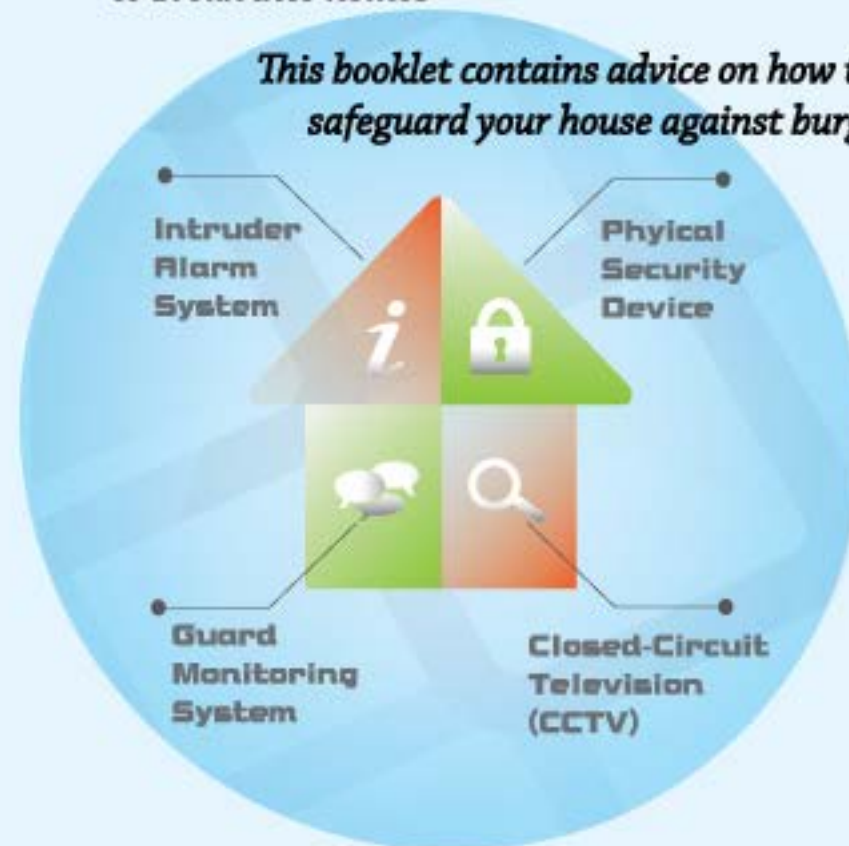


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(1) Introduction

How to Secure Your Home

This booklet contains advice on how to assist you in safeguarding your home against burglary. It is designed primarily for the owners of village houses, although many of the recommendations contained herein apply equally to homes of all descriptions.

Most burglaries are “opportunistic” in nature, meaning that burglars take immediate advantage of what they perceive to be lax security. You may have left home for five minutes to do some shopping, but a thief has already found his way into your unsecured property and stolen your valuables left lying around. The first thing to remember, therefore, is to remain vigilant at all times and take simple precautions such as locking the windows and doors before leaving home.

This booklet also contains advice on how to make your home less of an inviting target, or so difficult to break into that the burglar gives up or turns elsewhere. At the very least these security measures will help to slow down the potential intruder, thereby increasing the probability of his or her discovery and arrest.

Much of the advice described in this booklet is surprisingly simple, cheap and effective, and much less costly than any burglary you might suffer. By adopting some or all of these recommendations you will significantly reduce the chances of becoming a victim of burglary.

(2) Risk Assessment

Start by assessing the risk to your house:

- Is the existing security adequate?
- Is your house in a secluded location or hidden from view?
- Is it often left vacant for long periods of time?
- Have your neighbours been victims of a burglary before?
- Have you heard of illegal immigrants frequenting the area?
- Does the public have access?
- Do you have a lot of valuables in your home?
- Is the vicinity well lit?

After assessing the risk of burglary, you should take immediate measures according to the level of risk determined to make your home safe and secure.

(3) The Next Step

Having assessed the risk of burglary, you can now examine your house for vulnerabilities. Do this in a systematic manner: begin with the perimeter of your property and work your way towards the inside. If your house comprises two or more storeys, begin at the ground floor and work upwards. Consider from which part of the house burglars might enter through. Pay particular attention to the most vulnerable points of entry, such as gates, doors, windows and balconies.

Put yourself into the burglars' shoes, look at your home and imagine how you could gain entry. How you might get into the house if you accidentally locked yourself out? If you can do it, then a professional burglar certainly can.



(4) Perimeter Security

Some, but not all, houses have an existing fence or wall around the property. If you don't have any wall or fence (but hold rights to the land) you might consider erecting one. Your District Lands Office may be able to advise you of your land boundaries if you are unsure.

Steel palisade fencing makes for the ideal perimeter barrier. Not only is it difficult to climb up or break through, but also increases the visibility of your property from outside.



The fence or wall should ideally be at least 1.8m high and topped with barbed wire or spikes to prevent scaling. Cut back any trees or vegetation that overhangs the fence or wall.



Do not leave ladders and tools lying around your property. Remove or secure these items to prevent them from being used by burglars to gain access to upper floors or to break into your home.



(5) Lighting

Exterior, or outdoor, lighting can reveal the presence of potential intruders as they approach your house, at the same time increasing their fear of being seen.



Outdoor lighting



Some types of lighting work on motion detection and switch on automatically when someone triggers the invisible motion detection beam.



Motion Detection Lighting System

(6) Gates & Grilles

Metal door gates and grilles can help protect your property, provided that:



- The gate or grille is of sturdy construction and fitted with good quality locks.
- The frame is properly fixed to the exterior masonry, and any gaps are covered by steel plates.
- The gaps between grille bars are narrow, thereby preventing burglars from reaching through to open the gate from the inside.

Don't rely solely on latchbolts (see Page 13) to lock your gate, as they are easy to manipulate from the outside.

A good alternative to gates or grilles is a roller-shutter with quality padlock.



(7) Doors

For many houses, it is the doors that provide the first line of defence against intruders. It is paramount therefore, that they be properly secured.



Typical Hardwood door

Use a solid hardwood door, at least 50mm thick.

Avoid doors with wooden or glazed panels. If inevitable, secure them by other means.

Fit at least one good quality, key-operated mortise deadlock (see Pages 13-16)

Avoid dual-leaf doors if possible. If you must use them, ensure that doors are rebated (or overlap) and that the inactive leaf is fitted with flush-bolts at the top and bottom edges.



Flush Bolt

There should not be any gaps between leaves, or between door and frame. If there are, cover them with metal plates (or 'shrouds').

Remember that front and rear doors should be secured to the same standard.

Door Frames

It is important to remember that door and doorframes are equally important in terms of security as they always work hand in hand to offer the greatest protection.

Ideally, the doorframe should be rebated, made of solid hardwood, and properly fixed within its structural opening.

The strike plate should be solidly embedded in the doorframe. Reinforced strike plates are available.

(8) Door Furniture

Install a wide-angle viewer, and a door chain or door guard.
(*Please select the door viewer with cover to avoid person who look through your door viewer from outside.)



Wide-angle Door Viewer



Door Chain



Door Guard

Door Hinges

Ideally, doors should be attached to their frames by at least three steel, brass or bronze butt hinges evenly spread apart, depending on the size and weight of the door.



Typical Butt Hinge

Hinge Bolts

On outward-opening doors the exposed hinge is most susceptible to attack.

Consider the use of hinge-bolts, which are small bolts that protrude from the door on the hinge side. As the door is closed these bolts marry with corresponding holes in the doorframe.



Use at least two or more hinge-bolts per door. Locate them mid-way between hinges.

Door Bolts

Door bolts are cheap to buy, easy to install and simple to use. The bolt is fitted to the inner surface of the door and therefore concealed from attack.

Door bolts can be fitted horizontally or vertically. Multiple bolts at different points of a door will significantly increase its resistance to forcible entry. Heavy-duty bolts and staples (that part the bolt slides into) with multiple fixings should be used wherever possible.



Typical Tower Bolt

One disadvantage is that when leaving the house, the house owner must disengage the bolt. Otherwise he/she has to leave via another exit to keep the door bolted.

(9) Padlocks

Padlocks should not be used in place of locksets, although they do have their particular uses, for example to secure roller shutters or gates. Padlocks are preferably:



- Made from high-quality hardened steel.
- Of 'closed shackle' design.
- Key-operated and not combination type.

Closed Shackle Padlock

Avoid using padlocks with chains, as chains are vulnerable to attack. Better to use a padbolt or padbar (also known as a 'hasp and staple').

Padbars should be securely mounted. It should not be possible to remove the retaining pin from the hinge, and mounting screws should not be visible when padlocked.



Padbar

(10) Locks

It is important to understand that mechanical door locks can have different types of bolt:



Latchbolt Lock

- The latchbolt has a 'beveled' face and is spring-loaded. When the door closes, the bolt automatically engages - it is not necessary to engage (or 'throw') the bolt.
- Latchbolts offer greater convenience to the homeowner since they lock automatically upon door closure.
- On the downside, they can be easily defeated unless additional security features have been fitted.



Deadbolt Lock

- The deadbolt has a square face but is not spring-loaded. The deadbolt must be operated by physically turning a key or knob.
- Deadbolts offer greater security than latchbolts, but only if the bolt is thrown.
- Bolts should protrude at least 2.5cm into the strike plate, else a pivoting deadbolt may be used.



Sash locksets contain a combination of both types of bolt.

(11) Which Lock Should I Choose?

We will now consider the main types of mechanical door lock available to house owners.



A mortise lock is designed to fit within a rectangular cavity into the door edge.



A rim lock is designed to be installed onto the surface of the door.



With a knobset (or cylindrical lockset), the key cylinders are contained in the doorknob rather than the door itself.

Although easy to install, cylindrical locksets are susceptible to many types of attack. Their use on external doors is not recommended.

Choose mortise deadlocks wherever possible as they offer greater resistance against attack than other designs. However, the fitting of a mortise is not recommended on thinner doors, in this case, consider replacing the whole door.

The optimal lock for most domestic premises is a key-operated 5-lever mortise deadlock conforming to British Standard 3621 (or its equivalent). In simple terms, this means the lock is of good quality and thief-resistant.

Other Points to Consider:

- Where only one mortise deadlock is used, install it at about half the height of the door.
- For additional security, consider installing a secondary lock, in this case a rim lock can be used.
- Another good option is a key-operated deadbolt (see picture below).
- Where two locks are fitted, install the mortised deadbolt about one third from the bottom of the door, and the other about one-third from the top.
- Remember always to throw or 'double-lock' the deadbolt when you leave the house.



Key-Operated Beadbolt

(12) Windows

Burglars normally use windows to gain entry because:



- They are frequently left open and allow easy access.



- Valuables are often left visible from outside and within easy reach of the burglar.

- Windowpanes can be easily smashed or even removed, allowing burglars to climb or reach through, or open the window from inside.
- Many window frames and catches can be forcibly opened with relative ease.
- Most properties have windows on the ground floor. Those at the rear or on the side of the house might be out of sight.

To improve the security of windows, consider:

- 'Fixed' windows that cannot be opened.



- Fitting locks to windows (many types are available on the market).

- Fitting mild-steel bars, decorative or child-proof grilles over windows (but remember to consider access in an emergency).



- Changing to laminated or toughened window glazing.
- Installing electrically operated 'typhoon' shutters.
- Putting reflective or opaque film over windows to prevent snooping.
- Installing break-glass sensors or magnetic contacts, linked to a local or remotely monitored alarm system (see Pages 24-25).
- Most importantly, removing valuable items from plain view.

(13) Balcony and Patio Doors



Open balcony or patio doors are an invitation to the burglar. Keep these doors closed and locked when not at home.

If your balcony or patio doors do not have built-in locks, then:



- A supplementary locking device can be affixed to the top and bottom rails / runners to prevent doors from being opened from the outside.
- A simple bracket can also be placed over the inside handles to prevent from easy reaching.
- Another common method is to place a stick in between the door and the wall to stop the door from being slid open.
- If the sliding doors are exterior fitted, install battens (wooden or metal strengthening strips) to ensure the doors cannot be lifted from their runners.

(14) Drainage Pipes

Burglars can climb up drainage pipes or suspended structures to gain access to upper storeys. To prevent this:

- Affix barbed wire or spikes to drainpipes.



Umbrella Spikes

(15) Air Conditioning Vents



Air Conditioner Cage

Openings in outer walls for air conditioning units or ventilation fans should be bricked up when not in use, or encased with steel bars fixed permanently to the exterior masonry.

(16) When Someone Calls at Your Door

Before opening the door, look through your door viewer to ascertain who is calling.



If the person is unknown to you:

- Attach the door chain / door guard before opening the door to them.
- Confirm the identity of the caller before letting them in to your house. If the caller claims to be a trader, ask for proof of identity.
- Telephone the trader's employer if necessary, especially if his/her arrival at your door is unannounced.
- Remembers this: if in doubt, keep them out!

(17) Personal Property

Ideally, valuable items of property or large amounts of cash should not be kept in your village house. If you insist on doing so, please use a high quality safe (secured in place by internal bolts) to store these items.



Typical Home Safe

Consider marking your valuable property by means of permanent etching, invisible UV pen, or other available methods. You can use your Hong Kong Identity Card number to identify your property.



Property Marking Under UV Light

Record important details of your valuable property and keep original receipts if possible. Take photographs of the property from different angles. For smaller items, place a ruler alongside to indicate scale.

The above information may assist the Police in identifying your property if it is stolen and later recovered, and may also help you make an insurance claim.

List of valuable items is available for download from the Crime Prevention Bureau website at:

http://www.police.gov.hk/info/doc/bilingual_property_inventory_form.pdf

Keep your completed list of valuable items, receipts and photographs in a safe place, preferably at a second location away from your house. Update this list on a regular basis.

Ensure that the contents of your home are fully insured against burglary and theft.

貴重物品清單
List of Valuable Items

請使用本表格記錄所有貴重物品的詳情，萬一物品失竊，便容易追查有關詳情了，故此在遺失時請將資料填下。
Please use this form to record details of all your valuable items. It is much easier to do this now than to try and remember an object after it is stolen.

完成後請將本表格儲存在安全的地方，萬一物品失竊，本表格會成為失物記錄，並可幫助警方尋回您的物品。
When completed, fill in and store this form together with the relevant photos and receipts in a secure place. The form will help you to record in the event of a theft, and may assist the Police in recovering your property.

項目 Item	品牌 Brand	型號 Model	序號 Serial No.	描述/特徵 Description / Special Feature	價值 Value

List of Valuable Items

(18) Intruder Alarms

The physical security measures discussed so far can only help deter or delay a potential intruder. To be effective, these measures need to be combined with some means of detecting the presence of a burglar, raising the alarm, and triggering an appropriate response. This is best done by means of an intruder (or burglar) alarm.

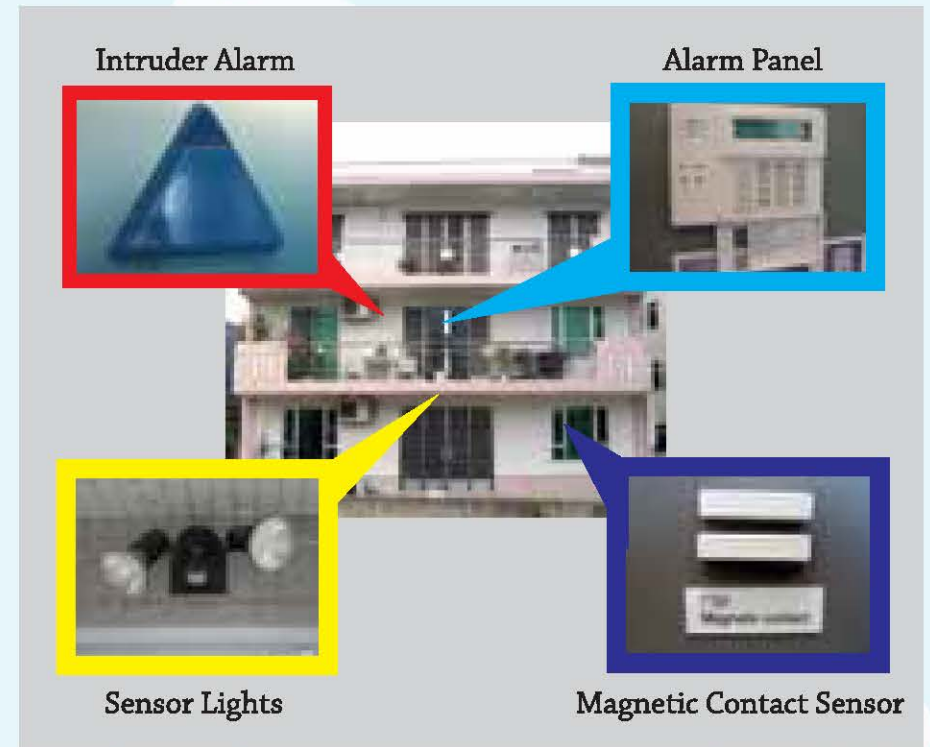
There are many types of intruder alarm systems available. Your first consideration is whether the system will be a local audible and/or visual alarm, or whether the system is to be centrally monitored by a licensed security company.

More expensive, centrally monitored alarms are an excellent way of protecting your house from burglary. You will be almost guaranteed a police response, provided that the alarm is maintained properly and false alarms minimised.

Local alarms, too, may serve the purposes of deterring a potential intruder and alerting neighbours to the presence a burglar. However, you should be careful not to cause undue disturbance to others, especially if the domestic premises are likely to be left unoccupied for long periods of time.

If your home is fitted with an audible alarm, that alarm must reset itself 15 minutes following any activation. Failure to do so may render you liable to prosecution and a fine.

If you are considering installing an alarm, seek professional advice from a properly licensed installation or alarm monitoring company. For more information, visit the website of the Security & Guarding Services Industry Authority at, www.sb.gov.hk/eng/links/sgsia/index.htm



A Typical Residential Intruder Alarm System

(19) When Your Home is Unoccupied

It goes without saying that your home is at greatest risk when unoccupied, especially if for long periods of time. When choosing potential targets, burglars often look for telltale signs that a house is unoccupied, or that the house owner is unlikely to return anytime soon. To make your home less of an obvious target:



- Stop newspaper and milk delivery services. If newspapers stack up at your doorstep, it gives an obvious sign to burglars that you are away on holiday.
- The same applies to mailboxes; ask a friend or neighbour to keep an eye on your house and to empty the mailbox regularly.



- To make your house look occupied, use timers to turn on and off lights, radio and television at designated times. Your friend or neighbour could also change these settings once in a while, to keep potential burglars guessing.
- If you have a driveway, ask your neighbour to park his/her car on your driveway while you are away.

(20) Some Other Useful Tips

Here are some useful tips to safeguard your home against burglary:

- Keep your keys safe, and do not leave spare keys in obvious places.
- Do not label your house keys with your home address, otherwise anybody who has found the keys can gain access to your home.
- Most burglaries occur during the day when no one is at home. Nevertheless, when you go to bed at night, lock your bedroom door. Keep a flashlight and mobile phone in the bedroom for use in an emergency.

- Keep an eye out for strangers within your area and report any unusual activity to your local police station. Encourage your neighbours to do the same on your behalf.



- Remember to brief domestic helper(s) and all other members of your household regarding these crime prevention tips. Domestic security is everyone's business.
- If you live in a village join the local committee.

Most importantly, remember to lock all windows and doors before leaving the house!