Home Entry Points

The average burglar has only two options for entering your residence: doors and windows. Examine your entry points and see how well they would stand up to a thief. Doors and windows can be fashionably secured with ornate, yet sturdy, door handles and locks. Quality locksets can be a good way to add beauty and security.

Doors

Doors are an important part of a successful security program. Hollow-core doors are easily kicked in. For external doors and doorframes, opt for solid wood or steel. Avoid leaving gaps around the doorframe, as this provides leverage for removing the door from its frame. Hinges should be positioned on the inside of the door so that a thief with a screwdriver will be unable to remove the entire door.

Sliding glass doors are a common entry point. Many of these doors can be lifted off their tracks. For maximum security, use vertical bolts. Also place a metal or solid wood rod on the inside track to hold the door closed. These measures will help prevent burglars from forcing the door open or lifting it off the track.

Garage doors are another frequent entry point. The door that connects your garage to your home should have solid wood or solid-core construction. Secure it with a deadbolt lock. Don't rely on the electric garage door opener as your only security measure. Also, when you are pulling out of your garage, take a few seconds to watch the door close completely. You do not want a thief to slip under the door before it closes and have easy access to your home. Back doors are a popular target because they are often hidden from the street and many homeowners leave them unlocked. It's important to keep your back door well lighted and install a deadbolt. These doors should have a solid-core as well.

If your doors have decorative sidelight panels on the side, beware! Burglars can smash these panels to open the door. If you have sidelight panels, make sure to use a break-resistant material or replace them.

A burglar is usually too big to fit through a pet entrance, but children can be bribed to crawl in and open the door for him. Only install pet doors that can be securely locked when you are away from your home.

Locks

When you move into a new house, apartment or condominium, change all of the locks immediately. Because keys have a tendency to multiply, you don't know who will have access to your home if you do not change the locks.

Anyone with a moderate amount of skill and desire can pick a common spring-latch lock with a flexible piece of plastic. As a result, deadbolt locks are a necessary investment.

Doors with single-cylinder deadbolt locks are opened on the outside with a key and on the inside with a turn of the hand. Double-cylinder deadbolts require a key on either side of the door. If you have windows near your door, install a double-cylinder deadbolt lock because burglars could smash the glass and unlock a single-cylinder deadbolt from the inside. Look for a deadbolt with a 1" throw and a reinforced strike plate with 3" screws. The extended throw makes it extremely difficult for an intruder to dislodge the lock from the frame. The longer screws attach the strike plate deeply into the framework of the home, making it harder to break into your residence.

Windows

One of the most common entry points for burglars is a ground level window at the rear side of a home. That's why you should use the same security measures on your windows as you would on your doors. Screens on windows do not guarantee the security of the window. While they may slow a burglar's progress, they are easily cut or removed. Window locks are an inexpensive way to keep intruders out. On double-

hung windows (which side up and down), center locks are only effective when the window is completely closed. Locks on the corners or mounted on the sides will allow you to secure windows in a partially open position.

Replace the handle catches on casement windows with keyed locking handles and remove the crank when it is not in use. Keep the key away from the windows, but make sure that it's easily accessible in case of an emergency.

Louvered windows, which open outward like awnings, can be very difficult to secure. Consider replacing them with safer double-hung windows.

Burglar bars are another way to keep thieves out. Attached to windows, they make it almost impossible to enter your home. But remember that this works both ways: bars can keep you inside when you need to get out. Consequently, keep the key near the bars.

Remember that none of these measures will help you if you leave your doors and windows unlocked. It only takes a few minutes for a thief to rob you of your most valued possessions. Always lock your doors, no matter how soon you plan to return.