

Check your home security

The following guidelines are for you to check your own home security. To complete the exercise properly should take about 30 minutes. You may want to make notes as you go along or print off these pages and use them as a checklist.

We'll start with the perimeter of your property. This is the boundary line where it joins either the street or your neighbour's property. Stand in the street and take a good look at your house:

- As you look at the front of the house is the front door clearly visible?
- Are there bushes, shrubs and walls that can hide someone trying to open your front door?
- Can the windows be seen clearly?
- Does the house look well cared for?
- Do doors to the house and garage look secure and sturdy?

Now walk around the whole boundary as far as you can, looking out for the following points:

- Are there any gaps and holes in the boundary?
- Are there any climbing places?
- Are there any hiding places?
- How many entrances are there?

Boundary lines at the front of the house should be wide and low to help passers by and neighbours to keep an eye on the front of the house. Boundary lines at the sides and rear of the house should be tall. You are allowed to have perimeters 1.8 metres high (6 ft) before you need planning permission.

If the boundary looks easy to climb over consider the following:

- For walls, try growing prickly bushes or climbing plants on the ground below the wall and up the wall to deter intruders.
- For fences, wobbly trelliswork on top of the fence makes them difficult to climb, consider prickly plants as well.
- If it is a shared boundary with a neighbour or your neighbour's responsibility, speak to them. It is both your best interest to improve security and may well reduce any financial outlay.

Now, to look at the house itself, but before we go any further - STOP. Pause for a few minutes and imagine this - you have just arrived back to an empty house and realise you have forgotten your keys.

- How would you get in?
- Are there spare keys hidden somewhere?
- Is there a door or window that is always left open?
- Is there a door or window that you know is easy to open?
- Can you get in through the garage?
- Will you be able to get in making hardly any noise or without being seen?
- Will you be able to get in without causing any or hardly any damage?

Think about how easy or difficult it would be to get into the house. If you would find it relatively easy - so would a burglar! Look at the building as a whole:

- Are there drainpipes that can be climbed?
- Are there flat roofs that give access to other windows?
- Are there walls, wheelie bins, trees or other items to assist climbing?
- Cast iron drainpipes can be covered with anti-climb paint to prevent climbing. Where there is easy access to upper floor windows, added security may be needed for those windows.
- Is there loose brickwork, woodwork or items left lying about which a burglar could use to break a window?
- Can a burglar easily get into a shed or other outbuilding to find something to help them break in?

- When it gets dark, go outside and take another look at the house, especially at the back and sides.
- Is it very dark?
- Can someone approach the house and get quite close without being seen?
- Would someone be able to spend some time trying to get into the house without being seen?
- Are there more hiding places now?

Good lighting outside the house is an excellent deterrent. Lights fitted to a photo-electric cell which come on as it gets dark and stay on until it gets light, sometimes called 'Dusk to Dawn' lights, are very good. Using low energy or energy efficient light bulbs will help to reduce the running costs. Motion sensor lights can be effective, but are often triggered by pets and wild animals. The beam of these is usually quite strong so care needs to be taken that you aim it away from neighbours - as this may annoy them.

Now let's consider the door and entrances to your home.

- Are the frames sound and do they fit well to the building without any gaps?
- What is the thickness of the door?
- Does the door look sturdy and does it fit properly in the frame?
- Does the door have wooden or glass panels?
- Are these resistant to kicking or breaking?
- Wooden doors should be of a minimum thickness of 44mm. Glass panels should be fitted with laminated glass. Weak wooden panels can be reinforced with plywood or other strong wood. UPVC doors are usually good if installed to manufacturer's specifications. If you want extra locks or security you should seek advice from the installer or manufacturer rather than doing it yourself.
- Take a close look at locks, hinges and any bolts on the doors.
- How many locks are there on the door?
- Do the doors open inwards or outwards?
- Can the locks be double locked from inside the house?
- If there are bolts fitted, do they fit well and do you use them?

Wooden doors should have two locks (at least one of which conforms to British Standard 3621) - a five-lever mortise lock and a cylinder rim lock, ideally one which can be double locked from inside with a key. For further advice consult a locksmith who is a member of the Master Locksmith Association.

Hinges must be securely fastened to the frame and capable of taking the weight of the door. Where a door opens outwards and the hinges are exposed to the outside, hinge bolts should be fitted to prevent the door being removed by slipping out the hinge pin.

- Take a good look at the letterbox and around the front door.
- Can you see inside the hall from any windows by the front door?
- Can you see inside the front hall by looking through the letterbox?
- How far can you get your arm through the letterbox?
- Can you reach the door locks?

Letterbox baskets fitted inside the front door will stop anyone reaching the locks. There have been reported cases of sticks with magnets on the end being poked through letterboxes and property being stolen. There are various new products on the market now whereby a solid piece of metal is fitted over the back of the letterbox ensuring that anything put through it is forced downwards towards the floor. Contact a reputable security company for further advice. Make sure any keys are not visible through the front door window or letterbox and not kept near the front door.

If you have patio doors or French windows answer these questions:

- Can the patio door be lifted up and out of the frame?
- What kind of glass is fitted?
- Do the doors open outwards?

- Patio doors and French windows should be fitted with toughened glass, which is more for safety than security. Laminated glass is not cost effective for such large areas.
- Patio doors often need at least one more lock in addition to the manufacturers. There should also be some kind of anti-lift device, either a bar in the top channel or locks positioned so that the door cannot be lifted.
- If French doors open outwards, then hinges will be on the outside so hinge bolts need to be fitted (see above).

Now look at the windows to your home:

- Are the frames in good condition?
- Are there any gaps between the frame and the building?
- Does the glass fit properly?
- Is the glass cracked?
- Is the putty or other fixing sound?

All ground floor windows and those capable of being reached by climbing must have locks that use a key. When leaving the house all windows should be closed - even those that you think a burglar cannot reach. Vulnerable windows should be locked.

Seek advice from a member of the Master Locksmiths Association about which locks to use. If the windows are PVCu double glazed, check with the manufacturer.

If you have an alarm fitted, when was it last serviced?

- If you have extended the house, does the alarm cover the extension?
- Is the key holders list up to date?
- Alarms should be fitted to British Standard BS 4737; DIY systems should conform to British Standard BS 6707. Seek advice from a reputable company or consult your insurance company to see which companies they recommend.

Finally, take a look at any sheds, garages or other outbuildings.

- Are the buildings themselves sturdy and sound?
- Are they capable of being securely locked?
- Are the doors sound?
- Are the windows sound?
- Are there visible hinges on doors?
- Is there access to the house from one of these buildings?
- Is anything of value kept in there?
- Is anything kept in there that may assist someone to break into the house?

Try and make these buildings as safe as you can use all the tips and hints given for houses. If you can't make these buildings secure - don't keep anything of value in there. Remember to add up the cost to replace all the lawnmowers, strimmers, DIY tools, and electric drills etc before you think they are of no value!

That's it. Although this survey is quite comprehensive, it is obviously not practical to write one for every eventuality or house design. If you do nothing more, ask yourself the question – "How do I get in without a key?" If the answer is "easily" - do something about it NOW!

Fire precautions

As a result of improving security, you may have to revise your fire security plan. Remember - security provisions should take priority when your home is unoccupied. Fire provisions should take priority when your home is occupied

Please note

Crime Prevention Advice is given free without the intention of creating a contract. Surrey Police do not take any legal responsibility for the advice given. Putting these measures in place may reduce the opportunity for crime.

Contact the Crime Reduction Advisor for Surrey Heath on 01483 631789.