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How to Protect Yourself from Becoming a Victim of Burglary

By far, the most common threat to our homes is burglary. According to the FBI, a burglary occurs every 15.4 seconds in the United States. Over the course of the last few months, the Township of Lawrence has experienced an increase in the number of residential and vehicular burglaries. The police department is committed to preventing future acts of burglary and is in the process of gathering leads to solve any past incidents.

The majority of residential burglaries occur during daytime hours when most people are either at work or school. Typically, statistics show that the months of July and August produce the highest number of burglaries. Burglaries are most often committed by young males under the age of 25, looking for items that are small, expensive and can easily be converted to cash. Statistics also show that 70% of all burglars use some amount of force to gain entry, but a burglar's preference is to gain access through unlocked doors and windows.

The New Jersey Criminal Code defines burglary as any incident where with the purpose to commit an offense therein, an offender enters a research facility, structure, or separately secured or occupied portion thereof, unless the structure was at the time open to the public or the offender is licensed or privileged to enter. The word structure in the criminal code also includes a motor vehicle. Simply put, if someone enters a residence or vehicle without permission and it is not open to the public, with the intention of committing an offense therein, it is considered a burglary.

Although burglaries may seem random in occurrence, they actually involve a simple selection process. Most offenders choose an unoccupied home with the easiest access, the greatest amount of cover and with the most convenient escape route.

With that being said, below find several tips on how to protect yourself from becoming a victim of burglary:

1. **Doors and Locks:** Always lock the doors when you leave your residence. Use solid core or metal doors for all entry points. Also use a quality deadbolt with a one-inch throw bolt. For sliding glass doors, always use a wooden dowel or stick to place in the tracks, thus preventing or limiting movement. For a motor vehicle, always ensure that the doors to the vehicle are locked and the windows are up. Never leave anything of value in plain view in the vehicle. Hide it in either the glove compartment or the trunk or take it with you.

- 2. Windows:** Most burglars prey on opportunity. Never leave ground floor windows open when you leave the residence or when you go to bed at night. Ground floor windows are more susceptible to being entered than second floor windows due to easy access. Homeowners should refrain from keeping items outdoors that could easily be used by a burglar to gain entry into the house. Ladders should be kept in the garage, while sheds and storage containers should be kept away from the house to deter against people using them to climb onto the roof.
- 3. Lighting:** Always keep lights on in the house during hours of darkness. A dark home on a nightly basis tells a burglar that you are away for an extended period of time. Putting lights on timers is an inexpensive way to keep your home safe. Also, keep a front exterior light on a timer to give the appearance that the house is occupied.
- 4. Shrubs and Bushes:** Always keep shrubs and bushes trimmed below the height of the window. By doing so, this limits the opportunity for a burglar to gain cover and access the window without detection.
- 5. Look out for your neighbors:** Try to get to know your neighbors. By knowing your neighbors, you will be better able to recognize if something is out of the ordinary, and your neighbors will be better able to do the same for you. You should also cancel or have someone pick up your newspapers and mail while on vacation. Allowing newspapers to pile up on the front driveway gives the appearance that no one is home.
- 6. Alarm System:** If your house is equipped with an alarm system, make sure that you always set it before leaving. Keep your contact list up to date with the alarm company in case a key holder needs to be contacted regarding your alarm being activated. Finally, placing whatever signs or stickers come with the alarm system around the exterior of your residence may help deter would-be burglars.

In conclusion, by following the above simple tips, you will greatly decrease your chances of becoming a victim of burglary.

The preceding information was brought to you by the Lawrence Township Police Department and the Lawrence Township Public Safety Advisory Committee, which generally meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:30 PM in the Manager's Conference Room in the Municipal Building.