

Dear West Highlands Residents, the season is upon us where we start to see an increase in home break-ins among a slew of other type of crimes (robbery, car theft, etc.). Collectively, we as a community need to become more vigilant in protecting our neighborhood from those who wish to disrupt our peaceful right to enjoyment.

There are many ways to make your house less appealing for thieves. Ultimately, however, the best way to fortify your house is in fortifying your relationship with your community. Talk to your neighbors and watch out for each other. Getting to know the people you live around is one of the most important safety steps you can take. Closer-knit neighborhoods generally report fewer break-ins because strangers will stick out, and people are more likely to keep a casual eye on other people's security.

If you see people you don't know or someone acting suspiciously, say hello. Oftentimes, simply acknowledging a suspicious person will halt whatever they were about to do because you have made them aware that they have been seen. And for a criminal, being identified is just as bad as being caught. And always **CALL 911**.

Below are key identifiers for suspicious behaviors. These behaviors have a direct correlation to break-ins within West Highlands.

- **Call 911 on any and all suspicious behaviors.**
Signs of suspicious behavior include:
 - Unidentified person knocking at your door
 - Unfamiliar person passing by your house more than once within the hour
 - Unfamiliar vehicle parked in your neighbor's driveway or driving in the rear-entry common driveways
 - Young person (under the age of 25) driving a minivan
 - Usually the "vehicle of choice", an older model Dodge/Plymouth Caravan but could be other manufacturers minivans. SUVs are also known to be seen at the scene of a crime.
 - Unfamiliar vehicle passing your house more than once within the last 10 minutes (particularly if the driver is cruising and turning his/her head from side to side)
 - Person or persons lingering or walking slowly as if there is no final destination or immediate need to be somewhere (possibly scoping out the scene).
 - Person or persons posted up at intersecting corners (possibly the look-out persons)
- **Call 911 if you hear a burglary siren regardless if you know where the source the sound is coming from**
- **Call 911 if you see a house door open or garage door open and you do not see the owner or the owner's vehicle on the premises.**
- **Call 911 if you see broken glass or window open with no screen and you do not see the owner or the owner's vehicle on the premises. On second thought, Call 911 regardless of the case.**
- **Definitely Call 911 if you see someone at your neighbor's house who does not look like they belong.**

Here are some useful tips in safeguarding your home:

- Install an alarm system with motion detectors. Set all doors and windows to instant siren except for the one entry door that you commonly use to enter and exit your home (usually the door from the garage).
- Make sure to add at least two sirens in the attic pointing outside of your house near the vents so that your neighbors or security driving by can hear it blaring. Post a yard sign indicating that you have an alarm whether or not you actually do. Place security signage at all entry doors, not just the front door.
- Install security cameras and/or a video surveillance system that monitors the entire perimeter of your house. Post a yard sign indicating that you have video surveillance whether or not you actually do. I have a yellow smiley face sign that reads, “Smile you are on camera. 24 hour video surveillance.”
- Install storm doors on your exterior doors. Make sure to adhere to the HOA requirements by installing a full glass door with the frame color that matches the exterior side of the door or the exterior trim color of the house.
- Reinforce your doors by installing locks with a one-inch or longer throw (meaning the bolt passes one inch into the door frame). Ideally, a double cylinder lock deadbolt lock is preferred (a key on either side of the door). Invest in a solid metal frame with at least one three-inch screw for each hinge plate can make it difficult for a burglar to kick your door frame right off the surrounding wall.
- Create an illusion that your house is occupied even when you leave. Leave a light on or install automatic timers, music or television. If you have a spare vehicle, park it in your driveway or in front of your house. If parked in your driveway, change the direction often. If parked in front of the house, move it at least several feet from where it was initially parked.
- Install a simple pin or nail into to the window frame to stop it from raising more than a few inches. This will add an additional layer of security in case someone pops off the screen and you have left the window unlocked. If you have a wooden window frame, you can drill a hole at your desired height above the sash, where the top and bottom window meet. Then, insert a thick metal pin or a sturdy nail into the hole. You can remove the stopper if you want to open the window completely and put it back in for security.
- Trim down tall shrubs and cut away tall tree branches to prevent criminals from hiding or taking cover. Planting thorny shrubs beneath your windows can make it an even less attractive place to hide.
- And don't forget to lock ALL doors and windows (including the door that leads into the garage). Delaying a burglar includes keeping unusual entry points from being accessible. None of the aforementioned precautions amount to much when your doors or windows are unlocked.

Determine how secure your home is by completing the West Highlands Home Security Checklist posted on West Highlands HOA website:

<http://westhighlandsatl.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Home-Security-Checklist.pdf>

Other safety tips shared by your West Highlands neighbors:

- Make sure your doorbell works. If your bell rings when you are not expecting it, yell out “I’ll get it” to make sure whoever is on the other side believes there are multiple people at home, even if there are not.
 - Peep out to gain a complete visual of the unwelcomed visitor before opening your door. If you don’t recognize the person at your door, dial “91” and be ready to dial the last “1” before opening the door or inquiring further on their identity.
 - If you still feel uncomfortable opening the door, you can either ask the person at the door to step off your property and you will communicate with him/her between your door and the sidewalk. On a few occasions, I walked around my house from the rear and surprised the unwelcome visitor on the front lawn.
 - Don't be afraid to appear rude for talking to them through the door. Keep in mind that as soon as you open your door, the person on the other side immediately has access to a slew of useful information – what type of locks/security you have on your door, how big that barking dog of yours actually is, what you look like and how trusting you are, and what type of stuff you have in your house.
- Be careful what you throw away. When you put your trash cans out the night before collection day understand that there are a full 12 hours for people to pick through your boxes and papers to see what you have that they'd like to take. When you buy new electronics, take the boxes to the dumpster at your office instead of putting them outside your home. Invest in a shredder as well, though be sure to hide it in a cabinet away from your files.
- Remember that if it's easy and logical for you, it's a no-brainer for the thieves. Most people keep their “important things” in their master bedroom where it will be closest to them, and therefore safest, right? That's why the master bedroom is the #1 target for thieves. The kitchen is typically the last place they look since there are simply so many places for you to hide something in the kitchen. Most of us hide things so that they are easy to remember. Unfortunately, this also makes them easy to guess. Take time to determine if your hiding strategies are too obvious and if so, change them up.
- If you are going out of town for an extended period of time, let our security officer know at (404-426-6345 and 404-481-9839).
- Also, alert neighbors you trust about your trip and ask that they keep an eye on your property during that time. In other words, don't leave signs of an empty house. Piled up mail, overgrown lawns and newspapers strewn about your yard will send surefire signals you're miles away. Have a friend house-sit or at least pick up your mail and newspapers. Ask them to move your car periodically to make it look like you're still around.
- When leaving and returning to your home, allow for some extra time to tour the property and report any suspicious behavior to 911 and security (404-426-6345 and 404-481-9839).

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