



Secure Your Valuables

make it hard for thieves and burglars

It's coming up to the time of year when the buying of presents is almost mandatory. Thieves know this only too well, and they are geared up for it. A single break-in can net them hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars from what they can steal; and in many instances it's easy picking. They watch and wait, noting the comings and goings from residences to ascertain when a place will be unattended and for how long. They may even be lucky enough to see bags and boxes taken from the car into a home; and frequently these packages display iconic logos of stores and manufacturers that declare – these people have money galore, so we might as well have some of it.

There are ways to make it difficult for the criminals, both before and after the fact. To begin with, avoid leaving goods just purchased sitting on car seats in plain view. An opportunistic thief could spot them, and it takes them no time at all to break in and whisk them away. Certainly, people wandering through the car park might see and report the theft; but the crooks don't care and will be gone in a flash. The same caution needs applying to other property such as briefcases, handbags and laptops. If they have to be left in the car, hide them in the trunk where they can't be seen. As for using the glove compartment as a temporary safe, it isn't secure; and even if locked, the flap is no trouble to pry open with a screwdriver, causing damage that usually costs a small fortune to repair. Also, keep coins for parking meters on your person, and leave the empty ashtray open the same way canny shopkeepers do with their tills. This sends the message: there's nothing worth stealing here!

Although reasonably secure, a home is definitely not a castle. Exterior doors and windows should be locked before vacating the premises. Even when someone is there, leaving these access points open or unlatched is unwise. There have been many instances of thieves coming in, taking what's on offer, then slipping away without being noticed by a person in another room. In the more violent cases, occupants may be deliberately confronted by an intruder who will go to any lengths to get what they want. So, keep your valuables safe, and yourselves safer.

Locking interior doors might seem a good idea. It would certainly keep the kids from peeking at the presents they are expecting to receive; however, once inside, a thief will take this as a sign that there is something valuable in the room. Needless to say, a simple lock on a wooden door isn't going to stop them; and, like the car glove-box, the resulting damage will be costly. There is also a strong possibility that the inconvenience of having to break through an interior door could rile them to the point where they exact revenge by trashing the entire place. If they do manage to get into a home, it would perhaps be better to allow free access to all areas in the hope that they will go about their business and leave quickly without wrecking everything.

With respect to individual valuables generally stored in the home, especially easily-transported products such as TVs, video recorders, cameras etcetera; if they are stolen, identifiable items are not as easy to sell-on; and should they eventually be recovered, proof of ownership makes life easier. Forget stickers or felt pens which can be removed. A small engraving tool is relatively cheap and can be used to etch a personal ID on the underside or back of a unit. A driver's licence number or social security number would be ideal. Some insurance companies actually reduce contents premiums if valuables are marked in this way.

Always assuming a home is insured along with the contents, bear in mind that, when unattended, all exterior doors and windows need to be locked, particularly any deadlocks. If not, the insurance company is likely to refuse paying a claim because the place wasn't secured as per the conditions of their policy.

One last piece of advice: when you are actually in residence, especially if sleeping, don't deadlock outside doors; just latch them securely instead. In an emergency situation when speedy evacuation is necessary, having to hunt for keys could prove disastrous. Belongings can be replaced – you can't!

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