



Urban Times

ARCHIVES

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From FEBRUARY 2006:



Police emphasize the value of turning your porch light on every night. The rear of homes, as well as alleys, should also be lit because lights are a major crime deterrent. Residents should also leave indoor lights on in evening hours, so would-be burglars won't know that nobody is home.

Fighting crime: it takes some neighborly help

A CITY POLICE OFFICER who cruised through Lockerbie Square one recent evening was struck by the darkness.

As in lack of light. Few porch lights. Few lights coming from inside the homes. Fewer lights illuminating alley areas. To the officer, the message was clear: Nobody home.

Burglars will get the same message, Officer Tony Brown said when he addressed the Jan. 10 meeting of the Lockerbie Square People's Club.

"We need light - especially in the alleys," he said.

Brown, community relations officer for the Indianapolis Police Department's Downtown District, was invited to speak to the neighborhood group after several recent incidents, most prominent of which was the early January burglary of the Park Avenue home of Jim and Nancy Obergfell.

Brown's message to the neighborhood: Be vigilant, eliminate opportunity and watch out for each other.

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Officer Tony Brown

ly," he said. "Be suspicious. There's nothing wrong with being a nosy neighbor."

Brown, a former member of IPD's Downtown Bike Patrol, said crime statistics for downtown neighborhoods are relatively low - a fact that is of no comfort to victims of crime.

"As a homeowner, one theft is one too many," he

said.

The value in statistics, Brown continued, is that they allow IPD to shift resources to where the crime is occurring. Therefore, he urged residents to report all incidents, no matter how seemingly insignificant.

"We use the statistics to increase patrols," Brown said, noting that police especially don't want crime to start becoming a serious problem in areas that have historically been quiet.

Neighbors can do their part by taking common sense measures. "Don't leave your garage door open if you're working in front of the house," he said. And don't leave bicycles just sitting around, even for a short period of time.

“Crime needs opportunity,” he said. “No opportunity, no crime.”

Brown said neighbors should not let any thoughts of political correctness deter them from studying “suspicious people” who linger in the neighborhood. He said the action does not have to be confrontational.

“If a person doesn’t live in your neighborhood, there’s nothing wrong with asking them if they need your help,” Brown said. And while you’re at it, be observant enough to be able to provide a description of that person later.

People who are victimized by crime have a better chance of recovering their stolen items if they have the proper records, Brown said. Residents should write down the serial numbers (not the model numbers) of such items as televisions and DVD recorders, he said.

For items without serial numbers, use a tool such as an etching pen to mark the items in some way as your own.

Shirley Purvitis, who coordinates the IPD’s CrimeWatch program, said another effective way to identify appliances involves those return address labels provided by not-for-profit organizations. Without taking the paper backing off, slip one of the labels into the back of the device so that it is hidden, but can be found later during a police investigation.

Brown said anyone wanting a better idea of what burglars target needs only to visit a pawn shop. “I guarantee you that half the things on the shelves are stolen,” he said.

Better vigilance can help minimize the problem, he said.

“If we took a little more time to lock our doors,” Brown said. “We can work together to try to ease the pain.”

To report a crime, call the emergency number: **911**. Non-emergency calls can be directed to:

Downtown District **327-3811**
(Lockerbie, Chatham Arch, St. Joseph)

North District **327-6100**
(Old Northside, Herron-Morton Place)

East District **327-6200**
(Cottage Home, Woodruff Place)

CrimeWatch Coordinator Shirley Purvitis can be contacted at 327-3781 or via email at p1527@indygov.org.

– Bill Brooks

Protecting your property

Advice from IPD: Install deadbolts and leave your porch lights on at night

AN UNUSUALLY HIGH NUMBER OF home burglaries in the Urban Times area is good reason for neighbors to review the steps needed to help prevent such incidents

Among the most important, and easiest, steps to take:

Leave your porch lights on.

Indianapolis Police Department officials also want residences to report all break-ins. The majority of such incidents are not reported, police said – a fact that makes it difficult for police to allocate resources. By knowing where and when the crimes are occurring, police can better prevent further crimes by beefing up patrols or helping neighbors learn how to better secure their homes.

When protecting your possessions, residents should keep in mind three things:

❑ Many burglars will spend less than 60 seconds trying to break into a home.

❑ Almost half of all completed residential burglaries were made possible by unlocked doors & windows.

❑ Darkness & shadows provide good cover for watching a target residence and also for escaping.

The first step to combat crime, police said, is to make sure your home is secure. They offer this advice:

Locks, lights and landscaping are easy to use and can make all the difference. Sturdy and well-installed deadbolts, metal or solid wood doors, and locked windows create a barrier against easy entry.

A lighted area outside allows your neighbors

and the police to observe the area and see if anyone is wandering around. Lights on inside the home make it look occupied and make it less appealing to a burglar.

The criminal wants to get in and get out as quickly and as quietly as possible, and to do it without anyone seeing him. Your job is to make that as difficult as you can.

“Remember that you and your neighbors are your best defense,” police said.

Stay aware of your home and the others on your block. If you see someone wandering around outside, or sitting in a car for a long period of time, it could be cause for concern.

Make sure to report this type of behavior to the police. “It is better for us to come and check a situation out,” police said, “than to find out later that someone’s home had been burglarized.”

Indianapolis Police Department officials continue to urge all residents to report all incidents. “We need you to call us when you see suspicious behavior,” an IPD spokesperson said, “and also to report if a break-in occurs in your home.”

“If something looks questionable – a slit screen, a broken window or an open door – don’t go in,” police warn. “Call the police from a neighbor’s house or a public phone.”

HOME SAFETY TIPS

Residents are being asked to leave their porch lights on at night – as well as any other exterior lights that might be around.

“Thieves hate bright lights” is the good advice of an Indianapolis Police Department CrimeWatch

brochure, which offers other tips to help prevent home burglaries, a crime that will affect one of every 10 American homes this year.

Among the other tips:

CHECK THE LOCKS

Did you know that in almost half of all completed residential burglaries, thieves simply breezed in through unlocked doors or crawled through unlocked windows?

☐ Make sure every external door has a sturdy, well-installed dead bolt lock. Key-in-the-knob locks alone are not enough.

☐ Sliding glass doors can offer easy access if they are not properly secured. You can secure them by installing commercially available locks or putting a broomstick or dowel in the inside track to jam the door. To prevent the door being lifted off the track, drill a hole through the sliding door frame and the fixed frame. Then insert a pin in the hole.

☐ Lock double-hung windows with key locks or “pin” windows by drilling a small hole into a 45-degree angle between the inner and outer frames, then insert a nail that can be removed. Secure basement windows with grilles or grates.

☐ Instead of hiding keys around the outside of your home, give an extra key to a neighbor you trust.

☐ When you move into a new house or apartment, re-key the locks.

CHECK THE DOORS

A lock on a flimsy door is about as effective as locking your car door but leaving the window down.

☐ All outside doors should be metal or solid wood.

☐ If your doors don't fit tightly in their frames, install weather stripping around them.

☐ Install a peephole or wide-angle viewer in all entry doors so you can see who is outside without opening the door. Door chains break easily and don't keep out intruders.

CHECK THE OUTSIDE

Look at your house from the outside. Make sure you know the following tips:

☐ Thieves hate bright lights. Install outside lights and keep them on at night.

☐ Keep your yard clean. Prune back shrubbery so it doesn't hide doors or windows. Cut back tree limbs that a thief could use to climb to an upper-level window.

A LIGHTED AREA OUTSIDE allows your neighbors and the police to observe the area and see if anyone is wandering around. Lights on inside the home make it look occupied and make it less appealing to a burglar. The criminal wants to get in and get out as quickly and as quietly as possible, and to do it without anyone seeing him. Your job is to make that as difficult as you can.

☐ Clearly display your house number so police and other emergency vehicles can find your home quickly.

☐ If you travel, create the illusion that you're at home by getting some timers that will turn lights on and off in different areas of your house throughout the evening. Lights burning 24 hours a day signal an empty house.

☐ Don't let your mail (or newspapers) pile up! Call the post office to stop delivery or have a neighbor pick it up.

☐ Make a list of your valuables – VCRs, stereos, computers, jewelry. Take photos of the items, list their serial numbers and descriptions. Check with law enforcement about engraving your valuables through Operation Identification.

☐ Ask law enforcement for a free home security survey.

CONSIDER AN ALARM

Alarms can be a good investment, especially if you have many valuables in your home, or live in an isolated area or one with a history of break-ins.

- ❑ Check with several companies before you buy so you can decide what level of security fits your needs. Do business with an established company and check references before signing a contract.

- ❑ Learn how to use your system properly! Don't "cry wolf" by setting off false alarms. People will stop paying attention and you'll probably be fined.

- ❑ Some less expensive options include a sound-detecting socket that plugs into a light fixture and makes the light flash when it detects certain noises, motion sensing outdoor lights that turn on when someone approaches, or lights with photo cells that turn on when it's dark and off when it's light.

BURGLARS DO MORE THAN STEAL

Burglars can commit rapes, robberies, and assaults if they are surprised by someone coming home or pick a home that is occupied.

- ❑ If something looks questionable – a slit screen, a broken window or an open door – don't go in. Call the police from a neighbor's house or a public phone.

- ❑ At night, if you think you hear someone breaking in, leave safely if you can, then call police. If you can't leave, lock yourself in a room with a phone and call police. If an intruder is in your room, pretend you are asleep.

- ❑ Guns are responsible for many accidental deaths in the home every year. Think carefully before buying a gun. If you do own one, learn how to store it and use it safely.

TAKE A STAND!

- ❑ Join a Neighborhood Watch group. If one doesn't exist, you can start one with help from local law enforcement.

- ❑ Never leave a message on your answering machine that indicates you may be away from home. Rather than saying "I'm not at home right now," say "I'm not available right now."

- ❑ Work with neighbors and local government to organize community clean-ups. The cleaner your neighborhood, the less attractive it is to crime.

For more information, contact the Indianapolis Police Department CrimeWatch program at 327-3781, or via the internet at www.indygov.org/ipd.