



# Home Burglary Prevention Tips

In the period of 10/01/11 through 12/31/11, there were seven (7) home burglaries in Seminole Manor according to Tallahassee Police Department statistics. For this reason, the following tips are provided to help you better secure your home from burglars.

According to FBI statistics, most burglaries are committed by young males under 25 years of age looking for items that are small, expensive, and easily converted to cash. Most burglaries occur during daylight hours when people are not home. Of course, this is not always the case, but regardless, the challenge for you is to make it as difficult as possible by adding multiple security layers to your home. That way, if they successfully break through one layer, they'll encounter another. Most burglars want to get in and out as quickly as possible.

Remember, nothing is completely fail proof; if someone wants to break into your home, they can most likely find a way. But, hopefully, the following tips which run from the gamut from cheap to expensive can help. You can get more detailed information online by doing a simple search online. Type in the terms "home security" or "preventing home burglaries," and you'll be surprised how many results you will get.

## Perform a Security Audit

Both the Tallahassee Police Department and Leon County Sheriff's Office offer security audits of your home. They will assess weaknesses in your home's security and recommend things you can do to increase it. You can contact TPD at 891-4251 or the Leon County Sheriff's Office at 922-3323 to inquire about these programs. The following tips can also help you increase your home's security.

## Buy a Security System (if you can)

Numerous companies in Tallahassee provide monitored security systems for your home, but they can be expensive. Most also require a signed contract, sometimes lasting up to 5 years. But, security systems can be an effective deterrent to home burglaries. You should do plenty of research on such systems and decide if and when a professional security system is best for you.

You can also purchase and install your own security system. This includes alarm systems and/or video monitoring systems. Many online retailers sell these systems, and Lowes and Home Depot also sell basic systems. Just remember that these systems are not monitored, but they will alert you and your neighbors of any security breaches if installed properly.

## Dogs

Most studies indicate that a dog is also a great deterrent to burglaries, and the dog doesn't necessarily need to be an aggressive man-eater. Even small dogs can provide you with a level of protection you may not have anticipated. Just be aware that if you get or have a dog, you must abide by Animal Control Ordinances or risk having the dog impounded. Barking dogs which may annoy your neighbor may also get you in trouble. Also, some breeds of dogs (pit bulls, Rottweilers, etc.) may increase your property insurance. In fact, some insurance companies will not insure a home if you own what is considered a dangerous breed.

## **Always Lock All Doors and Windows**

Believe it or not, many burglaries occur because someone forgot to lock a door or secure a window. You may not even know that your windows open with a simple push. So, always lock your doors and windows. You can also add additional security measures like those outlined in the following sections.

## **Reinforce Your Doors**

Install dead bolts on all your doors. Most experts recommend a 1 inch bolt with a reinforced strike plate secured with four 3" screws. Also look at double-keyed dead bolts. These locks require a key on both sides. So, a thief can't simply break out a window, reach through, and unlock the dead bolt. Please note that some people don't like double-keyed dead bolts because they might prohibit a quick escape if your house were to catch fire. In fact, rental properties cannot have double-keyed dead bolts on all doors. If you are an owner, you can, but make sure that everyone in your household knows where the keys are in case they need to make an emergency escape.

You should also install a solid-core door. Some doors can simply be kicked in. Also, avoid purchasing or installing doors with more than 25% glass. Glass can be broken out. You can also reinforce your door with various devices such as door stops, security latches, etc. Remember, your back door and windows are the most vulnerable since entry through them is often obscured and not very noticeable by your neighbors.

## **Secure Patio Doors**

Sliding glass doors are notoriously easy to open. You can inexpensively secure these doors by placing a wooden dowel or more sophisticated device in the door track so that the doors cannot be opened from the outside. Of course, the door can still be broken, but not much is going to stop a thief that intent on entering your home.

## **Reinforce Your Windows**

Windows are easier to enter through than most people imagine. We assume that our windows are secure, but no one ever really checks. Quick and easy ways to reinforce your window include sliding a cut-to-size wooden dowel, metal pipe, or thick PVC pipe into the window track. This prevents the window from being opened. Just make sure that they can be easily removed in case you need to make a quick retreat from your home.

Other inexpensive ways to secure your windows include installing removable bolts in the window. You can purchase these devices at both Lowes and Home Depot. You simply close your window and drill a hole so that it goes through both the moveable and stationary frame. The bolt is inserted and the window is more secure. You can also purchase devices that lock windows in place. Since security layers are very important, consider installing all three devices.

## **Clean Your Windows and other entry points**

As silly as it might sound, keeping your windows and doors clean is a good idea. Forensics have better luck taking fingerprints or DNA evidence from a clean surface. Dirty surfaces can contaminate potential evidence and distort fingerprints. So, grab some Windex and clean your windows.

### **Install Safety Glass**

Safety-coated glass and plexi-glass are actually more secure than standard glass. But, they're also more expensive. If you can afford them, talk to local glass suppliers about ways to replace your existing window panes with more secure glass that is much more difficult to break.

### **Record the Serial Numbers of High-Theft Items**

Favorite items of burglars are cash, jewelry, guns, watches, laptops, iPods, digital tablets, game systems, DVD players, and other electronic devices. TVs are also high on the list because new TVs are much lighter and easier to steal than they used to be. Once these items are stolen, it's difficult to locate them if they're pawned or located unless you record serial numbers. So, record the serial numbers on all your valuables and place that list in a place that can be handed over to law enforcement if, god forbid, you ever need to. You can also place personal identification information on your items. Use a Dremel or other tool to engrave information that will help law enforcement identify the item when and if it is recovered.

### **Personalize your Garbage Can**

During one theft in Seminole Manor, the thieves used the City-issued garbage can to haul items away. When asked if the garbage could be identified, the victims said they couldn't. So, put your house number or other identifying mark on your garbage can so that it can be tracked as part of any theft investigation.

### **Know Your Neighbors**

Sadly, it's easy to live in a neighborhood and never get to know your neighbors. The problem with this is that you have no one looking out for your interests and vice versa. It's also hard to identify suspicious individuals if you don't know if they belong there or not. Seminole Manor is lucky in that so many people know one another, but if you don't, get to know your neighbors by sight and name. Once they've earned your trust, you can ask them to keep an eye out on your property when you're away from home.

### **Maintain and Prune Bushes and other Yard Growth**

Overgrown shrubs, trees, or other plants help shield burglars from sight. Periodically, take the time to prune overgrown shrubs that might obscure the view of your house, particularly around doors and windows. If your neighbors can't see your house, how will they know to report a burglary? An unkempt yard also sends a message that the property is abandoned or not cared for, making it a target. Other ways to use landscaping to deter thieves is to plant uninviting plants near windows. This includes thorn bushes (e.g. roses, citrus trees, etc.), Spanish bayonet, cacti, and other plants.

### **Don't Publicize Your Vacation**

Whatever you do, don't publicize your vacation publicly. Some people put information about vacations or trips on Facebook. This is a dead giveaway that you're not home if someone is sophisticated enough to be monitoring it. Also, while away, have neighbors collect your mail and newspaper. Request increased patrols by TPD during your absence, and put timers on lights and other electronics to give the impression that you're home.

## **Report all Suspicious Activity Immediately**

It's been said time and time again, but always report suspicious activity and suspicious individuals. If criminals feel like no one is watching or acting in the best interest of a neighborhood, they will target it. If they know they're being watched, they may simply go away. So, if you see anything that looks remotely suspicious, always call the Tallahassee Police Department at 891-4200 or the Leon County Sheriff's Office at 922-3300. If it's an emergency, call 911. The nearest law enforcement officer will respond. When making such reports, report any distinguishing physical characteristics to the dispatcher including approximately height and build, skin color, clothing, hairstyle, etc.

## **What about guns?**

No discussion about home security would be honest without mentioning firearms. It is your Constitutional right to own a firearm but make sure you understand the responsibility that comes with owning such weapons. If you're not familiar with firearms, take a class to learn about types of guns and corresponding safety measures. Numerous classes are offered in Tallahassee. Familiarize yourself with local, state, and federal laws including the "Castle Doctrine" and "Stand your ground" laws. Most importantly, ask yourself if you're willing to deal with the consequences if you ever have to pull the trigger.

Lastly, be aware that guns are high-theft items. Having them in your home gives thieves one more thing to steal. So, make sure you store them securely and record any serial numbers or identifying information to law enforcement.

## **This sucks doesn't it?**

The fact that law-abiding citizens have to take these kinds of measures to protect their lives and property is sad. Having your property and peace of mind contaminated or shattered sucks. The reality though is that if someone wants to get into your home, they can. All you can do is make it as difficult for them to do as possible. Law enforcement can't be available to monitor your home at all times; in fact, it may take them significant time to respond. A thief can be in and out of your home in a matter of minutes. So, you have to assume a high level of personal responsibility and action to secure your home.

Neighborhood Watch programs are designed to provide guidance in dealing with crime and to provide additional sets of eyes and ears. But, you also may have to act alone in some circumstances.

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## **REMEMBER**

Try to prevent a crime before it happens. Report all suspicious activity immediately to law enforcement (numbers below). Humans have an innate sense of knowing when something doesn't feel right. Trust it. When calling law enforcement, ask for officer contact even if it's only via phone. Whenever possible, request an incident number to ensure that the report was filed accurately and that the officer actually did a patrol.

## **EMERGENCIES – 911**

**Tallahassee Police Department – Non-Emergency – 891-4200**

**Leon County Sheriff's Office – 922-3300**

To relay concerns about potential criminal activity or to get more involved in Neighborhood Watch activities, e-mail the Neighborhood Association at [seminolemanorNA@gmail.com](mailto:seminolemanorNA@gmail.com).