Farmhouse Security

Farmhouses are particularly vulnerable to crime when they are left unattended. Houses that are large and in isolated places; being some distance from a road or not in sight of neighbours, are easy targets for thieves. Across New South Wales, there has been an alarming increase in break and enters to farm houses with everything in the home being taken, even the food in the cupboards. Many country homes have valuable antiques, guns and other items that are particularly attractive to thieves.

Homes are vulnerable when the occupants are elsewhere on the property, go to town or are away for any period of time, for example to go on holiday. Many weekend or hobby farms where owners are absent for weeks at a time can be subject to crime.

There are some precautions that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of break and enter when you are away from your home for any period of time.

Create signs of life

One of the most effective strategies for securing a vacant home is to make it appear as if someone is inside. "Signs of life" can be easily created.

- Keep blinds and curtains in normal positions. Many people have the habit of completely closing blinds and curtains before leaving home. This serves as a signal that the home is vacant.
- Don't advertise that you are not at home by leaving notes for traders or friends.
- Have a dog or two near the house. A good watch dog does deter thieves.
- Walk around your house and yard area and look at it through the eyes of a thief. Identify those areas where thieves could break in and make them more secure.
- Trees planted as windbreaks surrounding your whole house yard area make a good screen for thieves. Confine windbreaks to just one side of your yard.
- Ensure that doors and windows are of solid construction.
- Fit Australian standard deadlocks to all outside doors, reinforced with strong bolts, which are preferably key-operated.
Have key operated window locks fitted to all perimeter windows.

Don’t leave tools or garden implements in the yard. Lock them away in the garage or shed.

Keep firearms in a secure locked steel cabinet securely bolted to the floor. Store ammunition separately.

If you have to keep cash or jewellery in the house, a floor safe is a good idea.

Ensure all household items, tools and equipment are marked with an identification number. Engravings enable police to identify stolen articles and increase the chance of recovery.

Use a security-marking device to mark items with your driver's licence number and a 'NSW' for your state.

Anything of value should be marked and listed: televisions, video and DVD players, radios, stereo systems, antiques, guns, tools, musical instruments, artwork and furniture. Televisions and most household items can be marked with an engraving tool. Other items can be marked with an invisible ink pen.

Photograph or video your most valuable items against a ruler to indicate size.

Keep an inventory of all items of value. Record serial and model numbers, inscriptions, replacement value and other identifying features (A sample inventory is attached).

Take photographs or videotape of the interior of your house. Make sure cupboards and wardrobes are open. Store photos or tapes with the inventory list. Inventories and photographs help people to remember things that are missing for making reports to insurers and the Police.

Periodically update the inventory with new purchases and removing those items that have been sold or discarded. Christmas time is a good time to do this.

**Insurance pays**

It is very important to have adequate insurance cover. It pays to have full cover against theft of vehicles, equipment and livestock, as well as for the contents of your buildings. Advice from your insurance company is free – whether it’s about insurance itself, or on ways to make your farm more secure.

**Lighting**

Automatic timer devices make it possible to turn lights on and off in a vacant house. There are several devices on the market that allow lights to be turned on and off several times a day. It is best to locate timers in the living areas, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom etc. You can sequence the lights to recreate a daily living pattern. For example, set a timer to turn a living areas light on at dusk and off at 11.30 p.m. and turn a bedroom light on at 11.25 p.m. and off twenty minutes later. An additional timer might be used to turn a radio or television on or off. The relatively low cost of keeping a few lights on is a good investment in security.

Thieves hate bright lights. Install security lights operating on timing switches at each end of a house focused on the house yards to illuminate the house and yard area. Lights can be left on all night operated by a sensor to darkness.

**Other options**

Video surveillance cameras are also an option to ensure the identification of thieves. Thieves often come to a house and knock and then pretend they are looking for someone if someone answers. If no one is around, they then take what they want. It is important not to use cheap videotape in a camera or replay it several times over. Too often when a theft occurs, all that is available on a security camera tape is snow.

You can display stickers on doors or windows to serve as a warning to potential
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When you go on holiday

- Lock and secure all outside entrance doors and windows.
- Lock all chemicals, tools and equipment in sheds.
- Advise relatives or a trusted neighbour of your plans. Encourage neighbours to report any suspicious activity. Leave details where you can be contacted.
- Ask someone to check inside and around the house periodically.
- Avoid leaving keys for those who will be checking on the home. It is preferable to give that person a key.
- If there have been problems with break and enters in your district, advise local police of your travel plans. If your property is not too far from town, ask that police conduct some patrols in your area while you are away.
- If you have particular concerns about theft, consider hiring someone live in while you are away. However, make sure your neighbours and relatives know about this arrangement.
- Do not advertise your forthcoming travel plans in public or in the local newspaper.
- Avoid signs of "no life": Cancel all deliveries and have mail and newspapers held at the post office or arrange for its collection by a relative or trusted neighbour.
- Lower the volume of the telephone bell. The sound of a phone ringing without an answer is an obvious sign there is no one home. If you have an answer machine, avoid recordings that tell the caller you are out of town. Simply indicate that say you cannot come to the phone right now but that you will return the call as soon as possible.

Other homes on your property

With the economic decline in rural Australia over the past decade, many farmers have left the land. Some farms have been bought up by neighbours to form larger holdings. The result is an increase in the number of vacant homes on properties that are vulnerable to theft and vandalism.

- Try to rent or have employees occupy uninhabited homes on your property. Not only will this protect the home, but also occupants will increase surveillance on your property.
- Try to rent homes to people you know, or ask for references.

Acknowledgment:
These crime prevention strategies have been developed from the ideas and tried and true initiatives given to us by farmers across New South Wales. We sincerely thank them for their valued contribution. Additional material has been drawn from the South Australian Neighbourhood Watch Association.
URL: http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/
# Household Inventory

Name……………………………. Your I.D. Number……………………………..

Address……………………….. Other Marks……………………………………..

……………………………………. Phone Number……………………………..

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