

# U.S. News

## & WORLD REPORT

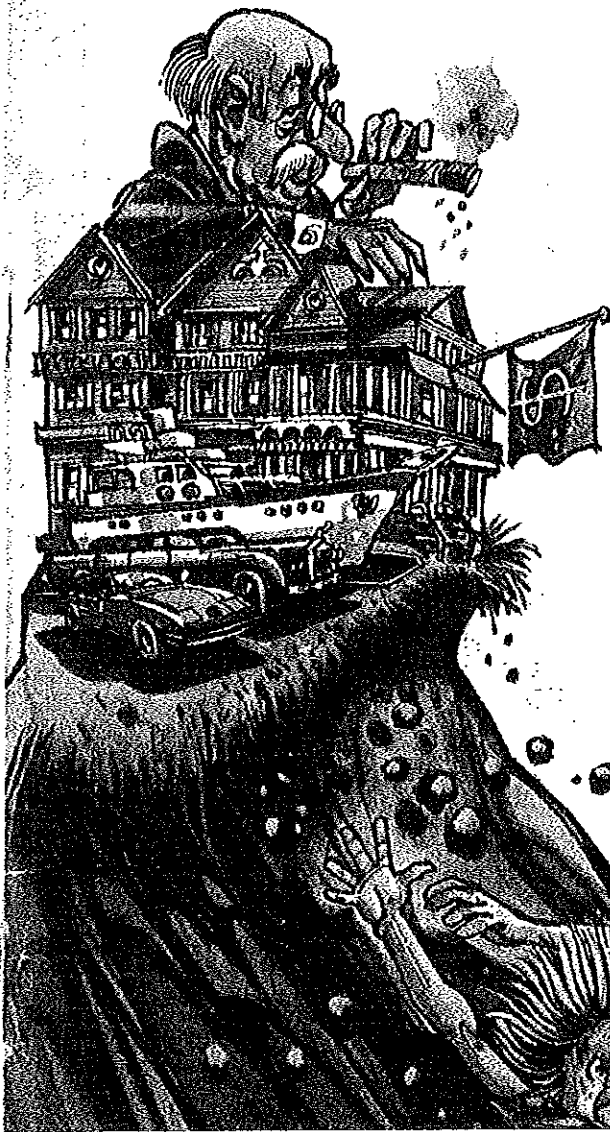
MARCH 30, 1981 \$1.50

**\$60 Billion of Federal Waste—Reagan's Next Target**

**How to Protect Your Home From Burglars**

# America's Middle Class

**Angry, Frustrated  
And Losing Ground**



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MARCH 30, 1981

*Interview With Thomas P. Prevas,  
Expert on Crime Prevention*

# How to Protect Your Home From Burglars

Household break-ins are in a sharp upswing, spurred by changing social and economic patterns. A counselor to insurance underwriters provides useful tips for safeguarding the house and the family car.

**Q** Mr. Prevas, this past winter has seen a sharp rise in home burglaries and auto thefts. What's the cause?

**A** There are four basic reasons: First is the direct and indirect influence of organized-crime operations. Second is the spreading use of drugs, which spurs some people to rob or steal to support their habit. Third is the impact of lagging business in some industries that has thrown people out of work. Finally, there's the lack of strict controls on handguns, which are used in many robberies.

**Q** Is most of this criminal activity professional or amateur?

**A** It's difficult to pinpoint the exact mix, but certainly crime transcends types of individuals. It permeates all levels of society; you can look at every segment and find people involved in crime. FBI figures show that burglaries are on the rise. There are about 6 million a year. Daytime break-ins are becoming especially popular.

Household goods and appliances are expensive—washing machines, dryers, TV sets, silverware. Those are tempting targets for theft. And even when amateurs steal such things, they need a place to market their stolen goods. So professionals help support a market for amateur criminals.

**Q** What suggestions do you have for the homeowner who wants to prevent his home from being burglarized?

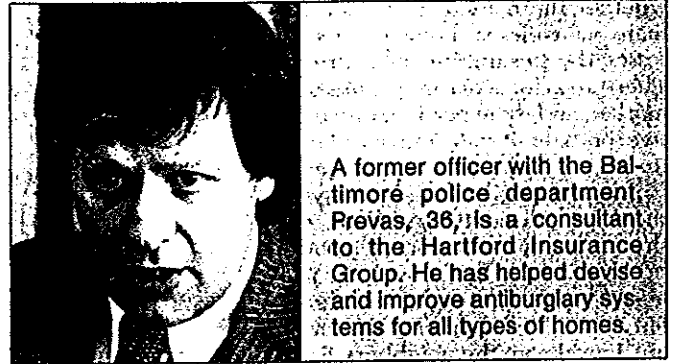
**A** The first step is to assess your real need for protection. That involves checking with the local police department to find out what sort of burglars—professional or amateur—if any, are operating in your neighborhood.

The second step is to evaluate exactly what there is to protect. Does your family have a lot of valuables? Are we talking mainly about a TV or a stereo set, or are we talking about \$30,000 to \$40,000 worth of silver or perhaps some antiques or rare objects of art?

Finally, you have to look at your lifestyle and your budget to see what is practical for you to do and how much you can afford to spend for protection.

**Q** Are there any practical steps?

**A** Yes. First, if you leave town on a trip, don't advertise that you're away. Piled-up newspapers, mail, trash can be a giveaway. A neighbor can be helpful in preventing a "vacant house" look.



A former officer with the Baltimore police department, Prevas, 36, is a consultant to the Hartford Insurance Group. He has helped devise and improve antiburglary systems for all types of homes.

JARRETT/EPH—USA/WR

**Q** What about lights that go off and on with a timer?

**A** They won't fool a pro, but they might confuse an amateur. And I should note that a great many break-ins are done by nonprofessionals—teen-agers or opportunists who spot a house that looks vulnerable. Locked doors and windows will discourage those people. Something like 50 percent of all burglaries occur through unlocked openings, with no sign of forcible entry.

**Q** What sorts of locks offer the best protection?

**A** Most windows can be made secure by simply drilling a five-sixteenth-inch hole through the upper and lower sash and inserting a quarter-inch casehardened pin. This type of locking system is hard to open even with a crowbar.

Doors should be protected by good-quality dead-bolt locks, preferably of a type listed by Underwriters Laboratories, Inc., and installed on the door and frame by a competent locksmith.

I want especially to emphasize the frame. Many people install an expensive lock on the door, but the frame is so weak that it can give way. A locksmith will assess the resistance of a door and frame and advise you on what mechanism is best. Also, you have to consider the construction of a door. If it has a window or window panels, a burglar might be able to break the glass, reach in and manipulate the lock.

**Q** Some experts recommend a double-cylinder lock that has to be opened by a key on both the outside and the inside—

**A** I'd advise against that type of lock. In case of fire—particularly when there are young children in the house—a double-locked door can make it hazardous to get out. Sure, you can hang a key on the wall close to the door, but it may not be there when you need it.

I suggest that if you have outside doors that have windows, you buy sheets of clear burglar-resistant glazing material—

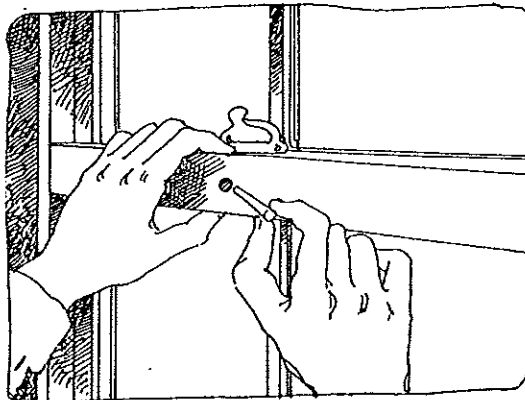
it's about an eighth of an inch thick—and mount them over the windows in each door. If this is done properly, it will hardly show. If a burglar breaks the glass, he still has to get through the plastic glazing, which is built to resist impact.

**Q** What about sliding glass doors?

**A** Most can be protected to some degree by putting a dowel on the track. The basic problem, though, is that a sliding door can simply be lifted off its track. Some locks are available that will prevent the door not only from moving horizontally but from being boisted up off the track.

**Q** Is it worthwhile to install an electronic-alarm system?

**A** That depends largely on



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whether the homeowner has a great many valuables and how he or she assesses the possibilities of a break-in. There are a lot of alarm systems on the market, and some can be quite expensive both to install and to maintain through monthly service payments.

An efficient home-alarm system should do three things: First, there should be a siren or sounder both inside and outside the house—the inside horn to scare the burglar and alert the family if they're home, the outside one to wake up the neighbors. Secondly, it should be able to detect a burglar going through—as well as opening—a door or window. Third, it should be connected to a central station or the local police department.

In any case, the householder considering an alarm setup should choose equipment that is UL listed, which attests to the quality of its construction and the reliability of its operation. Most insurance companies will give a premium reduction to homeowners who have installed a central-station burglar alarm or fire-alarm system.

**Q Suppose a burglar does manage to get into the house—**

**A** You should make sure that your valuables, such as TV sets, stereos, portable radios, electronic devices, are engraved with a number for purposes of identification. Some local police departments will lend you a tool for marking a number in an inconspicuous place.

One good ploy is to install a fake electrical outlet: Cut a hole in the wall, put your jewelry in a small bag and place it into the space, then put a faceplate over it. You can install such an outlet yourself, making sure that it is the same as all the others in a room, painted the same color. You're not tampering with any electrical wiring. Perhaps you can create a hiding place behind some wall paneling or in a hookcase.

The point is that a burglar doesn't have a lot of time to operate; he's in and out quickly. If he goes into a house and empties the dresser drawers and finds jewelry and maybe cash, that's the opportunity he's been looking for. And you'd be surprised how many people leave rings and diamond earrings and necklaces right on top of dressers or in a drawer. If you force an intruder to start searching for valuables in dummy wall outlets or above suspended ceilings or behind paneling, he's consuming a lot of time; you're making his task risky.

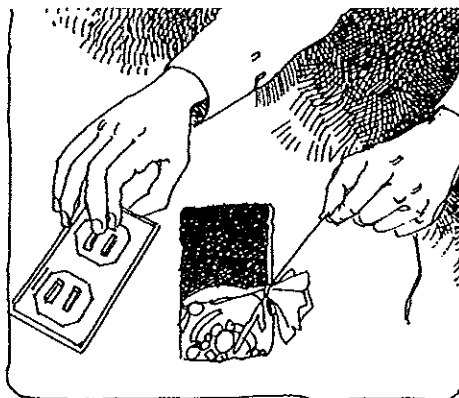
**Q Does a dog with a loud bark offer some protection?**

**A** Yes. However, I have doubts about the effectiveness of a dog in physically protecting you or your home. If a burglar is brazen enough to enter a house, he won't have much trouble overpowering or incapacitating a dog, even a large one—especially if the intruder is carrying a knife, a gun or even a pound of hamburger as an attractive bribe.

The one thing that can be said in favor of a barking dog is that he'll create noise and perhaps scare off a housebreaker. And if he barks in the middle of the night, he can provide a warning. But I have doubts about the value of a dog in actually confronting a burglar.

**Q Is it wise to scatter valuables around rather than keeping them in one area?**

**A** Of course. That can delay a burglar. If you're going on vacation for several days or weeks, it's a better idea to put your most valuable portable items in a bank safe-deposit box. Perhaps you can leave bulkier valuables with a neighbor.



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**Q Suppose a family has gone to bed and someone hears an intruder breaking in. What's the best thing to do?**

**A** I'd immediately call the police, assuming there's a phone in one of the bedrooms. Then I'd round up the family and get them out of the house if at all possible; otherwise I'd assemble everybody in one place and try to avoid contact with the burglar.

**Q Don't most professional burglars try to snip outside telephone wires?**

**A** That can happen. One safeguard is to have an electrical contractor install a rigid metal conduit—a pipe—down the side of the house. The telephone company then will thread the phone wire through the pipe and into the house.

I know of people who have installed a loud horn in the attic, connected to a small switch by the bed. If they hear someone coming in, they can hit the switch. Always remember that noise is one of the burglar's worst enemies.

**Q What's the best tactic if you're face to face with a burglar?**

**A** The best advice is to do exactly as you're told. If you can run and get away, do it. If you can't get away, do what you're told and don't resist. Avoid a confrontation. There's nothing more important than your life.

**Q What suggestions do you have for protecting an auto against thieves?**

**A** A great many thefts—about 20 percent of the total—occur merely because the car owner has left the key in the ignition and doors unlocked. So a vehicle always should be locked and the keys removed. Newer cars have improved locking systems that make theft more difficult. Also, do a little planning. If you're going to be coming back to your parked car after dark, be sure it has been left in a lighted area or in an attended lot.

These guidelines will deter most amateur thieves and joy riders—and those people account for a large percentage of stolen cars. To deter more-proficient thieves, an ignition-kill switch with a time-delay fuse or a fuel-cutoff device well hidden and secure under a locked hood can be helpful.

**Q How does that sort of switch work?**

**A** It cuts off the whole ignition system about 1 minute or so after the car has been started. A thief won't get very far before he's stalled, hopefully in traffic on a busy street. The switch is simple to install and costs only about \$8 if you install it yourself. It activates two different circuits. When the system is off, the current flows normally. When it's on—you activate it when you park your car—the current is cycled through the time-delay fuse.

**Q Are new cars now being stolen more often than used ones?**

**A** It is difficult to say because used cars are almost as marketable as new ones by professional thieves. There's a big demand for used cars overseas. And, of course, stripping a car for its parts is very profitable.

As to new models, I've heard that you can put in an order for any type of car you want and a car-theft ring will steal it and get it to you for a lot less than you'd pay a dealer. For that reason, you should take every precautionary measure you can: Avoid out-of-the-way parking places; make use of a neighborhood crime watch if you park your car on the street close to your home. There's nothing worse than a nosy neighbor so far as a burglar is concerned. □

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