

# Target Hardening



With target hardening techniques, you will make yourself a more difficult target by examining your home, vehicle, environment and lifestyle for security weaknesses and correct them. One of the best ways to do this is to pretend to be a criminal. Look at your home from the criminal's perspective and see how easy it would be to burglarize. Are doors and windows left unlocked? Are there tools in your yard that can be used to break in or be stolen? Are there overgrown plants near windows or entrances that would provide cover for criminals? Is the area well lit? Think about where you would choose to hide if you were an attacker and who you would choose for a victim and why. Do the same with your vehicle, where you park, shop, and work. After finding the potential hazards, take measures to correct them.

Given enough time and the right tools, a criminal can break into just about anywhere or attack anyone. Take a look at the following formula:

$$\text{Criminal} + \text{Opportunity} = \text{Victim}$$

Your goal is to make it as difficult for the criminal as possible – to remove “opportunity” from the equation. While it may not be practical or possible to make yourself completely invulnerable, the steps you take in target hardening will make it less likely that you will become a victim. Remember that criminals are predators that prefer an easy target. By reducing their opportunity, they are much more likely to avoid you and move on to an easier target.

Let's look at burglary (unlawful entry to commit a theft or felony) as an example. Crime statistics show us that a large portion of burglaries are committed without the criminal needing to force his way in. The criminal simply entered through an unlocked door or window. Some people leave their garage door openers in their cars and in plain site without even locking their doors. That's like handing your house keys to a criminal. Once inside your garage, they can work in private to gain access to the rest of your house and even use the tools in your garage to help them break in.

When target hardening, start with your home. It's the easiest place to start and often has the most security flaws. Look at your home from a criminal's point of view and conduct a security audit. Try to break into your own house and think about what a criminal would do and why they would select your home.

After you have corrected the weaknesses with your home, do the same with your vehicle and other property. Finally, expand the security audit to your lifestyle and environment. Think about what actions you take (or fail to take) that may make you an easier target and consider how you would attack someone if you were a criminal.

# Security Audit

## Your Home

- ✓ Keep all windows and doors locked. Use wood or metal rods to prevent windows and sliding glass doors from being opened wide enough for a person to enter. About 30% of burglaries occur without the use of force to gain entry.
- ✓ Don't advertise your new big ticket purchases by leaving the empty boxes on the curb for trash pickup. Dismantle or cut up the empty boxes before bringing them to the curb.
- ✓ Try not to locate expensive items where they can be seen from outside. This could tempt criminals to break in.
- ✓ Trim or clear away overgrown plants near windows and entrances to your home. These provide hiding spots for criminals to break into your house or to spring a surprise attack. Also remove tree limbs that would provide access to second story windows.
- ✓ Make sure entrances to your home are clear of obstructions and well lit.
- ✓ Install and use a peep hole in your front door. Do not open the door for anyone you do not know and trust.
- ✓ Make sure the address numbers on your house can be easily seen from the street. This will make it easier for police and ambulances to locate your address in the event of an emergency.
- ✓ Make at least one room in your home a "safe room". Equip the door with a strong lock and have pepper spray (or a fire extinguisher) and a charged cell phone in the room. If you cannot escape your home, go to that room and call the police. A small fire extinguisher can be used to temporarily blind and choke an attacker and it makes a good striking weapon after spraying.

## Your Vehicle

- ✓ Lock your car doors at all times. As soon as you get into your car, lock the doors. This simple act can discourage many criminals. It can also help prevent you from being thrown out of the vehicle during an accident.
- ✓ Your garage door opener should not be left in your car – take it with you. If your car is stolen, the criminal will likely be able to find your address from documents in your glove compartment and be able to gain access through an attached garage. At any rate, they will know that you won't be home for a while since they have your car.
- ✓ While waiting at a stop light or in traffic, give yourself enough room to go around the car in front of you. This will enable you to escape if someone approaches your car or even avoid being stuck if the car in front of you dies.
- ✓ Limit the number of items in your car that contain personal information to only those documents that are necessary. You don't want your car stolen and become the victim of identity theft.

- ✓ Make sure that any valuables are not in plain site. This includes putting your purse on the passenger seat while driving. Many criminals have used the “smash and grab” technique to steal not only when the car is parked, but also while stopped at a light. Put valuables in the trunk or on the floor of the vehicle so they cannot be seen from outside.

### **Your Environment**

- ✓ Be mindful of potential areas of criminal concealment in your neighborhood, work and other places you frequent. In this way, you will know to be cautious around these areas and increase your distance so as not to be caught off guard.
- ✓ Know where people often congregate at night and what stores are open late. If you are in danger, you must run to places with other people and places of safety.
- ✓ Get to know your neighbors – they can be your best defense against criminal activity in your neighborhood.
- ✓ Know the security phone numbers and procedures at your work.

### **Your Lifestyle**

- ✓ If you go out to a bar, make sure you do not become too intoxicated. In addition to making you an easy target, this can lead to legal problems, health issues and increased chances of injury (fighting or falling).
- ✓ Walk with a strong force presence. Force presence refers to your body language and the way you carry yourself. This can either tell criminals that you will be an easy target or that you are willing to fight back. To avoid being perceived as an easy target, walk with confidence and with your head up. You must project confidence but not arrogance. Walk with a smooth, normal paced stride. Keep your head moving to scan the area and people. Make direct, brief eye contact (staring too long at someone may be perceived as a challenge).
- ✓ Avoid distractions when walking. When people walk while engrossed in a cell phone conversation or listening to their iPod, they are in effect cutting off their awareness. In fact, criminals on the East coast have been specifically targeting people listening to their iPods because the distraction makes them an easy target.
- ✓ Think about the places you frequent and if there are is often fighting or criminal activity, avoid those locations whenever possible.
- ✓ Think about the people you hang around with. Are they sometimes jerks or do they provoke others? If so, you may want to talk to them about their behavior or limit contact – they may inadvertently drag you into an attack with them.
- ✓ Be mindful of identity theft. Only give out your personal information when absolutely necessary and to trusted sources. Get a cross-cut shredder and shred any materials that contain personal information before throwing them in the trash.