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Burglary of Single-Family Houses

by
Deborah Lamm Weisel

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Problem-Oriented Guides for Police
Problem-Specific Guides Series
Guide No. 18

Burglary of Single-Family Houses

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About the Problem-Specific Guides Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. The guides are written for police–of whatever rank or assignment–who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (An assessment guide has been produced as a companion to this series and the COPS Office has also published an introductory guide to problem analysis. For those who want to learn more about the principles and methods of problem-oriented policing, the assessment and analysis guides, along with other recommended readings, are listed at the back of this guide.)

- **Can look at a problem in depth**. Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation.

What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.

- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem.

- **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.

- **Are willing to work with other community agencies to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public entities. An effective problem-solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

The COPS Office and the authors encourage you to provide feedback on this guide and to report on your own agency's experiences dealing with a similar problem. Your agency may have effectively addressed a problem using responses not considered in these guides and your experiences and knowledge could benefit others. This information will be used to update the guides. If you wish to provide feedback and share your experiences it should be sent via e-mail to **cops_pubs@usdoj.gov.**

For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at www.popcenter.org or via the COPS website at www.cops.usdoj.gov. This website offers free online access to:

- the *Problem-Specific Guides* series,
- the companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools* series,
- instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics,
- an interactive training exercise, and
- online access to important police research and practices.

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The principal project team developing the guide series comprised Herman Goldstein, professor emeritus, University of Wisconsin Law School; Ronald V. Clarke, professor of criminal justice, Rutgers University; John E. Eck, associate professor of criminal justice, University of Cincinnati; Michael S. Scott, assistant clinical professor, University of Wisconsin Law School; Rana Sampson, police consultant, San Diego; and Deborah Lamm Weisel, director of police research, North Carolina State University.

Karin Schmerler, Rita Varano and Nancy Leach oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Megan Tate Murphy coordinated the peer reviews for the COPS Office. Suzanne Fregly edited the guides. Research for the guides was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University under the direction of Phyllis Schultze by Gisela Bichler-Robertson, Rob Guerette and Laura Wyckoff.

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Contents

The Problem of Burglary of Single-Family Houses

This guide addresses the problem of burglary of single-family houses. It begins by describing the problem and reviewing risk factors. It then identifies a series of questions to help you analyze your local problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem, and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice.

Reported U.S. burglaries have dropped dramatically in recent years, declining 32 percent since 1990. This drop is variably attributed to a robust economy, increased use of security devices, and cocaine users' tendency to commit robbery rather than burglary.[1] With an estimated 1.4 million residential burglaries in 1999, the total number of reported burglaries is at its lowest since 1966.[2] However, many residential burglaries–perhaps up to 50 percent–go unreported.[3] † Despite the large decline in reported burglaries, burglary remains the second most common serious crime in the United States (just behind larceny-theft), accounting for 18 percent of all serious crime. Burglary accounts for about 13 percent of all recorded crime in the United Kingdom.[4]

The burglary clearance rate has remained consistently low, with an average of 14 percent in the United States and 23 percent in Britain. Rural agencies typically clear a slightly higher percentage of burglaries. The clearance rate for burglary is lower than that for any other serious offense. Indeed, most burglary investigations–about 65 percent–do not produce any information or evidence about the crime, making burglaries difficult to solve. Burglary causes substantial financial loss–since most property is never recovered–and serious psychological harm to the victims.[5]

† Burglaries with entry are more likely to be reported than are attempted burglaries. In Britain, about 75 percent of burglaries with entry are reported, compared with 45 percent of attempted burglaries (Budd 1999). Burglaries are also less likely to be reported when there is no loss, or relatively minor loss (Shover 1991). Kershaw et al. (2001) found that 75 percent of burglaries with loss were reported in Britain, while only 16 percent of burglaries with no loss were reported.

† Research does not always clearly describe the housing types crime prevention projects cover, or it combines types. While this guide focuses on single-family houses, promising practices for all types of residential burglaries have been examined.

To many, burglary is an intractable problem–difficult to solve, and one in which the police role primarily entails recording the crime and consoling the victims.[6] Although burglaries have declined in recent years, police strategies such as Neighborhood Watch and target-hardening have had limited success in reducing these crimes. However, some quite specific, highly focused burglary prevention efforts show promise.

Related Problems

This guide focuses on burglary of single-family houses– primarily owner-occupied and detached. While there are many similarities between burglaries of these dwellings and those of multifamily homes, attached or semidetached houses, condominiums, and apartments (as well as other rental housing), the crime prevention techniques differ.† Single-family detached houses are often attractive targets–with greater rewards–and more difficult to secure because they have multiple access points. Indeed, burglars are less likely to be seen entering larger houses that offer greater privacy. In general, greater accessibility to such houses presents opportunities to offenders.[7]

In contrast to residents of other types of housing, private homeowners may use their own initiative to protect their property–and often have both the resources and incentive to do so. Residents of single-family houses do not depend on a landlord, who may have little financial incentive to secure a property. Most police offense reports include a premise code to help police distinguish single-family houses from other types of residences.

Although burglaries of multifamily homes are the most numerous, some studies demonstrate that single-family houses are at higher risk.[8] National burglary averages tend to mask the prevalence of burglaries of single-family houses in suburban areas, where such housing is more common. The proportion of burglaries of single-family houses will vary from one jurisdiction to another, based on the jurisdiction's housing types, overall burglary rates, neighborhood homogeneity–especially economic homogeneity, proximity to offenders and other factors.

Other problems related to burglary of single-family houses not addressed directly in this guide include:

- other types of residential burglaries, including those of apartments and other housing;
- commercial burglaries;
- drug markets and drug use; and
- other offenses related to single-family houses, including larceny and assault.

Factors Contributing to Burglary of Single-Family Houses

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses.

† Some police reports may record only the earliest possible time of occurrence, the midpoint of a time range, the time of the report, or the shift during which the offense occurred. These varied recordings will influence analysis of burglaries' distribution across time (Waller and Okihiro 1978).

Times When Burglaries Occur

Burglary does not typically reflect large seasonal variations, although in the United States, burglary rates are the highest in August, and the lowest in February. Seasonal variations reflect local factors, including the weather and how it affects occupancy, particularly of vacation homes. In warm climates and seasons, residents may leave windows and doors open, providing easy access, while storm windows[9] or double-pane glass[10] to protect against harsh weather provides a deterrent to burglary. The length of the days, the availability of activities that take families away from home, and the temperature may all have some effect on burglary.

In the United States, most residential burglaries–about 60 percent of reported offenses–occur in the daytime, when houses are unoccupied.[11] This proportion reflects a marked change in recent decades: in 1961, about 16 percent of residential burglaries occurred in the daytime; by 1995, the proportion of daytime burglaries had risen to 40 percent.[12] This change is generally attributed to the increase in women working outside the home during those decades–leaving houses vacant for much of the day. Thus, burglaries are often disproportionately concentrated on weekdays. The temporal pattern varies in Britain–about 56 percent of burglaries occur when it is dark.[13]

Exactly when a burglary has occurred is often difficult for victims or police to determine. Usually, victims suggest a time range during which the offense occurred. Some researchers have divided burglary times into four distinct categories: morning (7 a.m. to 11 a.m.), afternoon (12 p.m. to 5 p.m.), evening (5 p.m. to 10 p.m.), and night (10 p.m. to 7 a.m.). This scheme naturally reflects residents' presence at various times,†

as well as offender patterns. Some research suggests that burglars most often strike on weekdays, from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. and from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.[14]–times when even routinely occupied houses may be empty.

In many cases, determining the times when burglaries occur helps in developing crime prevention strategies and in identifying potential suspects. For example, burglaries by juveniles during school hours may suggest truancy problems. After-school burglaries may be related to the availability of alternative activities.

Target Selection

Burglars select targets based on a number of key factors, including the following:[†]

- familiarity with the target, and convenience of the location;
- occupancy;
- visibility or surveillability;
- accessibility;
- vulnerability or security; and
- potential rewards.

These elements interact. Visibility and accessibility are more important than vulnerability or security, which a burglar typically cannot assess from afar unless the resident has left the house visibly open.

Familiarity with the target, and convenience of the location. Offenders tend to commit crimes relatively close to where they live,[15] although older, more professional burglars tend to be more mobile and travel farther.[16] Burglars often

[†] These characteristics are also classified more generally as opportunity, risk, and rewards.

target houses on routes from home to work, or on other routine travel routes. This tendency makes the following houses more vulnerable to burglary:

- **Houses near a ready pool of offenders.** These include houses near large youth populations, drug addicts, shopping centers, sports arenas, transit stations, and urban high-crime areas.[17]
- **Houses near major thoroughfares.** Heavy vehicle traffic that brings outsiders into an area may contribute to burglaries.[18] Burglars become familiar with potential targets, and it is more difficult for residents to recognize strangers. Houses close to pedestrian paths are also more vulnerable to burglary.[19]

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Houses near major thoroughfares are more likely to catch the attention of burglars passing by. Moreover, it is more difficult to distinguish residents and visitors from strangers in heavily traveled areas.

- **Houses on the outskirts of neighborhoods.** Like houses near major thoroughfares, those on the outskirts of neighborhoods have greater exposure to strangers. Strangers are more likely to be noticed by residents of houses well within neighborhood confines, where less traffic makes their presence stand out. Such houses include those on dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs–locations with few outlets.[20]

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Houses well within neighborhood confines, such as those on dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs, offer two burglary deterrents: burglars have limited access to them, and residents are more likely to notice strangers.

- **Houses previously burglarized**. Such houses have a much higher risk of being burglarized than those never burglarized, partly because the factors that make them vulnerable once, such as occupancy or location, are difficult to change. Compared with non-burglarized houses, those previously targeted are up to four times more likely to be burglarized; any subsequent burglary is most likely to occur within six weeks of the initial crime.[21] There are a variety of reasons suggested for revictimization: some houses offer cues of a good payoff or easy access; burglars return to houses for property left behind during the initial burglary; or burglars tell others about desirable houses.[22] Burglars may also return to a target months later, to steal property the

owners have presumably replaced through insurance proceeds.[23] Numerous studies show that revictimization is most concentrated in lower-income areas, where burglaries are the most numerous.[24]

- **Houses near burglarized houses**. Such houses face an increased risk of burglary after the neighbor is burglarized.[25] Offenders may return to the area of a successful burglary and, if the previous target has been hardened, select another house, or they may seek similar property in a nearby house.

Occupancy. Most burglars do not target occupied houses, taking great care to avoid them. Some studies suggest burglars routinely ring doorbells to confirm residents' absence. How long residents are away from home is a strong predictor of the risk of burglary,[26] which explains why single-parent, one-person and younger-occupant homes are more vulnerable. The following houses are at higher risk:

- **Houses vacant for extended periods.** Vacation or weekend homes, and those of residents away on vacation, are particularly at risk of burglary and revictimization.[27] Signs of vacancy–such as open garage doors or accumulated mail–may indicate that no one is home.
- **Houses routinely vacant during the day.** Houses that appear occupied–with the lights on, a vehicle in the driveway, visible activity, or audible noises from within–are less likely to be burglarized.[28] Even houses near occupied houses generally have a lower risk of burglary.[29]
- **Houses of new residents.** Neighborhoods with higher mobility–those with shorter-term residents–tend to have higher burglary rates, presumably because residents do not have well-established social networks.[30]
- **Houses without dogs**. A dog's presence is a close substitute for human occupancy, and most burglars avoid houses with dogs. Small dogs may bark and attract attention, and large dogs may pose a physical threat, as well.[31] On average, burglarized houses are less likely to have

dogs than are non-burglarized houses, suggesting that dog ownership is a substantial deterrent.[32] (Security alarms, discussed below, are also a substitute for occupancy.)

Visibility or surveillability. The extent to which neighbors or passersby can see a house reflects its visibility or surveillability. A burglar's risk of being seen entering or leaving a property influences target selection, making the following houses more vulnerable to burglary:

- **Houses with cover.** For prospective burglars, cover includes trees and dense shrubs–especially evergreens–near doors and windows; walls and fences, especially privacy fences; and architectural features such as latticed porches or garages which project from the front of houses, obscuring front doors. Entrances hidden by solid fencing or mature vegetation–characteristic of many older homes are the entry point in the majority of burglaries of single-family houses.[33]

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High, dense shrubbery and privacy walls and fences provide concealment, thereby making houses with these features attractive burglary targets.

- **Houses that are secluded**. Secluded houses are isolated from view by being set back from the road, sited on large lots or next to nonresidential land, such as parks.[34] Seclusion reduces the chance that neighbors or passersby will see or hear a burglar.

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Secluded houses reduce the likelihood that burglars will be seen or heard, and are therefore attractive targets.

- **Houses with poor lighting.** For houses which are not secluded, poor lighting reduces a burglar's visibility to others. Steady lighting poses the threat that someone may be available to readily see the burglar, while motion-activated security lighting may serve as an alert in secluded areas. Lighting, of course, is not a factor in daytime burglaries, which are more common.

- **Houses on corners**.[35] Because burglars can often more easily assess corner-house occupancy, and corner houses typically have fewer immediate neighbors, they are more vulnerable to burglary. Burglars may inconspicuously scope out prospective targets while stopped at corner traffic lights or stop signs.[36]

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Corner houses offer advantages but also pose risks to burglars: they are more accessible, but police and others can better surveil them.

- **Houses with concealing architectural designs.** For privacy and aesthetics, some houses are designed and sited to be less visible to neighbors and passersby. Houses whose windows and doors face other houses appear to be less vulnerable to burglary.[37]

Accessibility. Accessibility determines how easily a burglar can enter a house. Thus, the following houses are at greater risk of burglary:

- **Houses easily entered through side or back doors and windows.**[38] Side or back entries are the most common access point for burglars. In some areas, the front door is the most common break-in point, but this likely reflects architectural differences.[39]

- **Houses next to alleys.** Alleys provide both access and escape for burglars, and limited visibility to neighbors. In addition, large side yards facilitate access to the backs of houses.

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Alleys behind houses provide burglars ready access and escape.

Vulnerability or security. How vulnerable or secure a house is determines how likely a burglar is to target it. The following houses are particularly at risk.

- **Houses with weakened entry points.** Poor building materials can make houses more vulnerable to burglary. Older houses may have rusting, easily compromised locks or worn and decaying window and door frames, while newer houses may be built with cheap materials.
- **Houses whose residents are careless about security.** Burglarized houses often have unlocked or open windows or doors.[40] Seasonal variations may determine burglars' access methods–summer months allow entry through open windows or doors, while winter months bring an increase in forced entry.[41]

- Houses with few or no security devices. Studies show that alarms, combined with other security devices, reduce burglaries. Burglars are less likely to gain entry when a house has two or more security devices (including window locks, dead bolts, security lights, and alarms).[42] Studies of offenders show that burglars may avoid houses with good locks, burglar bars or other security devices. By some accounts, burglars have already made the decision to burglarize a dwelling *prior* to encountering security features thus press ahead with the burglary. Experienced burglars may choose to tackle security devices,[43] but the devices slow them down, making them more vulnerable to being seen.

Potential rewards. In selecting targets, burglars consider the size and condition of a house and the type of cars in the driveway as indicators of the type and value of the house's contents.[44] Thus, the following houses are vulnerable to burglary:

- **Houses displaying signs of wealth**.[45] Large and well-maintained houses with expensive vehicles are at risk of burglary. However, burglars avoid the most expensive houses, presumably because they assume those houses have more security or are more likely to be occupied.[46]

Goods Stolen

Burglars are most likely to steal cash and goods they can easily carry and sell, including jewelry, weapons, televisions, stereo equipment, and computers.[47] They need transportation to move larger items, such as electronic equipment, while they often make off with cash and jewelry on foot.[48]

Few burglars keep the goods they steal. A study in Britain showed that burglars typically disposed of stolen property within 24 hours, usually after stashing it in a semipublic location. They thus minimized their risk by moving goods

only short distances.[49] They appeared to have few concerns about being arrested for selling stolen property, reporting they safely sold goods to strangers and pawnbrokers.[50]

Burglars tend to dispose of stolen goods through local pawnshops, taxi drivers and small-store owners.[51] Few burglars use professional fences.[52] Pawnshops–often outlets for stolen goods–have come under increasing scrutiny and regulation in many communities. Some burglars sell stolen goods on the street, occasionally trading them for drugs. Burglars commonly sell stolen goods in bars and gas stations;[53] in bars, they usually sell the goods to staff, rather than customers.[54] In many cases, burglars get little return for the goods.

Entry Methods

In about two-thirds of reported U.S. burglaries (including commercial ones), the offenders force entry. Unsecured windows and doors (including sliding glass doors) are common entry points. Burglars typically use simple tools such as screwdrivers or crowbars to pry open weak locks, windows and doors,[55] or they may simply break a window or kick in a door.

In about one-third of burglaries, the offenders do not force entry; they enter through unlocked or open windows and doors, especially basement windows and exterior and interior garage doors.[56] There is no consensus about the most common entry point–it depends on the house's architecture and siting on its lot.

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Open garage doors give burglars easy access to items in the garage, potentially provide access to the house, and, if there are no vehicles in the garage, indicate that the house is probably unoccupied.

Burglars

National arrest data indicate that most burglars are male–87 percent of those arrested in 1999.[57] Sixty-three percent were under 25. Whites accounted for 69 percent of burglary arrests, and blacks accounted for 29 percent.

A lot of research has been conducted with burglars in the last decade, much of it to examine their decision-making, especially about target selection. Much of the research comes from interviews with offenders. Their willingness or ability to recall burglaries may influence the accuracy of the findings. Also, since police clear so few burglaries, there are likely major differences between successful burglars and those who get arrested. Successful burglars may be older or may differ in other important ways from those who get caught.

Burglars can be quite prolific: one study found that offenders commonly committed at least two burglaries per week.[58] Some studies suggest there is great variability in the number of burglaries offenders commit.[59]

Burglars do not typically limit their offending to burglary; they participate in a wide range of property, violent and drug-related crime.[60] Some burglars, however, appear to specialize in the crime for short periods.[61] Burglars tend to be recidivists: once arrested and convicted, they have the highest rate of further arrests and convictions of all property offenders.[62]

Some research suggests that most burglaries involve more than one offender.[63] But there is considerable variability in co-offending. In one jurisdiction, 36 percent of burglars acted alone, while in another, 75 percent did. One study revealed that in about 45 percent of residential burglaries, offenders had a partner.[64] Young offenders are probably more likely to have one.

† Research suggests that the greater the financial loss due to a burglary, the less likely the police are to clear it (Poyner and Webb 1991), indicating that more skillful offenders commit the bigger burglaries.

Most research categorizes burglars–as novice, middle-range and professional, for example. Novices, the most common type, tend to be younger, make minimal gains from burglaries, burglarize nearby dwellings, and can be easily deterred by dogs, alarms or locks. Professionals tend to be older, carry out bigger burglary jobs, willing to take on security devices, and are more mobile, scouting good targets farther from home.† Middle-range burglars fall somewhere between the two, and more often work alone than do the others. A key feature distinguishing the types of burglars is their outlet for stolen goods. Professionals tend to have well-established outlets, while novices must seek out markets for goods.

Alternatively, some researchers categorize offenders as either being opportunistic or engaging in detailed planning[65]–a distinction useful for developing effective responses.

Research on burglars reveals the following characteristics:

- Most burglars are motivated by the need–sometimes desperate–to get quick cash,[66] often for drugs or alcohol. Some offenders, particularly younger ones, are motivated by the thrill of the offense.[67] A small number of burglars are motivated by revenge against someone such as an ex-girlfriend or employer.
- Studies suggest that drug and/or alcohol use and financial problems contribute to offending.[68] Many burglars use their gains to finance partying, which may be characterized by frequent and heavy use of drugs and alcohol and a lack of regular employment.[69]
- Drug abuse, particularly heroin abuse, has been closely associated with burglary.[70] In fact, some suggest the decline in U.S. burglaries during the 1990s was at least partly due to the rise in cocaine users and to their tendency to commit robbery rather than burglary.[71] Heroin and marijuana users are more likely to be cautious in carrying out break-ins, while cocaine users may take more risks.[72]
- Burglars do not tend to think about the consequences of their actions, or they believe there is little chance of getting caught.[73] Drug and alcohol abuse can impair their ability to assess consequences and risks.
- Burglars often know their victims,[74] who may include casual acquaintances, neighborhood residents, people for whom they have provided a service (such as moving or gardening), or friends or relatives of close friends. Thus, offenders have some knowledge of their victims, such as of their daily routine.[75]

Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of burglary of single-family houses. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy.

Descriptive information about typical burglars, at-risk houses and vulnerable areas reflects general characteristics of burglary in specific places or across a large number of offenses. However, different burglary patterns appear even within quite small areas.[76] Because burglaries are so numerous, calculating averages can mask variations, creating a myth about the typical burglary. Thus, seeking trends within larger datasets is crucial.

Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular problem of burglary in single-family houses, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

You may have a variety of hunches about what factors contribute to your local burglary problem–e.g., alleys, drug addicts or poor lighting. You should test these hunches against available data before developing an intervention. Because burglary patterns may vary from one neighborhood to another, or from one type of house to another, you may want to examine the differences between burglarized houses and a sample of non-burglarized houses. Since sampling can be complicated, you may wish to consult a sampling expert.

Premises

- What types of houses are burglarized? One-story, or two-story? Large, or small? Older, or newly constructed? (Visual surveys of burglarized houses will help you answer these and other questions.)
- How accessible are the houses? Is there rear access via alleys or pedestrian paths?
- How visible are the houses? Are entrances visible? Is the lighting adequate? Are the lots open and visible? How big are the lots, and how far are the houses from roads and neighbors? What type of fencing (if any) exists?
- How exposed are the houses? How close are they to major thoroughfares, parks or other public areas? Where are they located in the neighborhood?
- What types of security do the houses have? What types of security are in use?
- What house features contribute to burglaries? Substandard locks, windows or doors?

Victims

- What are the victims' characteristics? Elderly, and home during the day? Middle-aged, and away at work? Young, with changing schedules? Are they new to the area?
- What are the relevant victim behaviors? Do they leave valuable property exposed? Do they give service providers access to the house? Do they leave windows or doors unlocked or open? Do they have and use alarms? Do they have dogs? Do they leave clues that they are not at home (e.g., let mail accumulate or leave the garage door open when the car is gone)?

Offenders

- How many burglars work alone? How many work with others? How or where do those who work with others get together? Why do they offend together? How do they offend together? (Arrested offenders are a good source of information, but remember that they may differ from active burglars in important ways. In addition, they may be reluctant to share information if they are concerned about three-strikes laws.)
- What are burglars' demographic characteristics, such as age or gender? What is their ethnicity, as this may relate to targeted victims?
- Where do burglars live, work or hang out?
- Do burglars know their victims?
- How active are burglars? Do they account for a few burglaries, or many? Can you identify subtypes of burglars?
- What, specifically, motivates burglars? Do they need quick cash to party or to maintain a family? Are they addicted to drugs, and if so, to what? Are they recently jobless, or are they long-term offenders?
- Do burglars show evidence of planning their crimes, or do they take advantage of easy opportunities?
- How do burglars travel to and from the scene?
- How do burglars dispose of the goods? Through pawnshops? Through other outlets?

Incidents

- Do burglars force entry?
- What are the entry points? Windows? Doors? What tools do burglars use for entry?
- What side of the house do burglars enter?
- What house features reduce visibility to the point of enabling a break-in?

- How long do burglaries take? Do burglars take their time, or are they in and out in a couple of minutes?
- How much revictimization occurs? (Matching the addresses on offense reports will reveal those that account for a high proportion of burglaries.) What is the typical time period between initial and repeat burglaries?
- What type of goods do burglars steal, and how valuable are they? How do burglars take the goods from the scene? In a vehicle? On foot?

Locations/Times

- Where do burglaries occur? Near schools, stores, parks, athletic venues, drug markets, treatment centers, transit centers, or major thoroughfares?
- What time of day do burglaries occur? (There may be several groups of offenses, including afternoon burglaries committed by juveniles.)
- What days of the week, weeks of the month, and months of the year do burglaries occur? Does the time of the burglaries vary by day, week or month? (Weekday burglary patterns are likely to vary from weekend patterns; patterns on school days may vary from those on non-school days, which include weekends, school holidays and teacher workdays).
- Are there seasonal variations in the burglaries? For example, are there more forced entries in the winter?

Measuring Your Effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether they

have been effective. All measures should be taken in both the target area and the surrounding area. (For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers*.)

When evaluating a response, you should use measures that *specifically* reflect that response's impact. For example, police might give target-hardening advice to all burglary victims or all residents in a specific area. To determine the impact of the advice, you must assess the rate of compliance with it. If residents fail to close or lock windows and doors, installing locks or alarms will likely have little impact.

In addition, you must determine how many single-family houses are in your area before measuring response effectiveness. You can obtain such information from city planning agencies or other sources.

The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to burglary in single-family houses:

• Reductions in the number of burglaries in the targeted areas, including a comparison of those areas' burglary trends with those of the entire jurisdiction, of the areas immediately surrounding the targeted areas, and of comparable areas in the jurisdiction. (If your effort focuses on the entire jurisdiction, then you should compare your jurisdiction with similar ones.)
• Reductions in the number of completed burglaries. (Attempts, or unsuccessful burglaries, may actually increase.)
• Increases in the number of forced-entry burglaries.
• Reductions in the number of victims (addresses) burglarized, based on police reports. (The number of reported burglaries may increase after burglary prevention efforts, due to increased public awareness.)

- Reductions in the number of repeat burglaries.
- Changes in the number of burglary arrests. (Note that this measure does not directly reflect changes in the number of burglaries, but may be an indirect measure of the response. Even a single arrest can reduce the number of incidents.)
- Changes in the number of burglary prosecutions and convictions/increases in the number of burglaries cleared–including exceptional clearances.† (This, too, is an indirect measure of the response's impact.)
- Increases or reductions in the number of burglaries in nearby areas. (Burglaries may be displaced and thus increase in nearby areas, or burglaries may be reduced in those areas–a spillover effect from the response.)
- Reductions or increases in other types of crime (including burglaries of other types of housing).
- Reductions in the value or amount of goods stolen. (You should also check whether the types of goods stolen have changed.)
- Increases in the amount of stolen goods recovered. (Note that such increases are more likely to reflect a specific focus on stolen property recovery than on burglary reduction efforts.)
- Improvements in victim satisfaction with police handling of burglaries, as measured by victim surveys. (Such surveys should not be generic; they should include questions closely tied to the response implemented.)
- Changes in public perceptions of safety, as reflected in citizen surveys. (Such surveys should include specific questions about perceptions of safety. Improved perceptions of safety often lag behind actual decreases in crime. Some crime prevention initiatives reduce perceptions of safety–making citizens more vigilant may make them more fearful.)

Responses to the Problem of Burglary of Single-Family Houses

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: give careful consideration to who else in your community shares responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it.

Burglary prevention efforts typically involve a variety of responses; it has been difficult to assess individual response effectiveness. However, the following section describes specific responses that might be combined to form an effective burglary prevention strategy. Despite the importance of multiple interventions, you should avoid trying a little bit of everything; instead, you should use complementary tactics.

† The electronic industry cites a study of three suburban locales. Residences with alarms faced a 1.4 percent risk of burglary, while residences without alarms faced a 2.3 percent risk (Hakim and Buck 1991). Due to research limitations, these findings should not be presumed to hold true for all jurisdictions.

Situational Crime Prevention Responses

A range of burglary prevention responses involve target-hardening, increasing the risk–or presumed risk–of detection for offenders, and reducing the rewards. While police have historically recommended many of these responses, they are increasingly used in tandem with one another and with other strategies. Most research suggests it is the combination of responses that is effective.

1. Installing burglar alarms. Burglar alarms have become quite prevalent. An estimated 17.5 percent of U.S. households have them.[77] In Britain, 24 percent of households had alarms in 1998–a doubling in proportion since 1992.[78] At an average installation cost of $1,200 in the United States, along with monthly monitoring charges of about $25, alarms are concentrated among more affluent households.[79]

Burglar alarms have a high rate of false alerts–perhaps as much as 95 percent. Despite that rate, alarms are often recommended for crime prevention. The National Crime Prevention Institute recommends installing alarms, and some insurance companies offer urban policyholders discounts for doing so. (For more detailed information on alarms, see Guide No. 5 in this series, *False Burglar Alarms*.)

Most studies of burglars indicate that many will avoid residences with alarms, but alarm effectiveness has not been well evaluated.† As alarms become more prevalent, their effectiveness may change. If most residences in an area have alarms, burglars may tend to avoid the area. Even if a burglar tackles an alarm, its presence may cause him or her to be hasty; burglars steal less property from houses with alarms.[80]

Portable burglar alarms have been effectively used for crime prevention. Police agencies have issued them temporarily to detect offenders. In one burglary prevention project, a small pool of portable alarms were allocated on a rotating basis, according to risk.[81]

2. Installing closed-circuit television (CCTV). CCTV has been widely used in commercial buildings, public settings and apartment complexes. It may also be used for single-family houses, although such applications will be cost-prohibitive for many, and have not been evaluated. CCTV may deter burglaries, or offenders might confess when confronted with incontrovertible evidence. Temporary CCTV installations may be an option, particularly when used after repeat burglaries or with an alarm.[†] CCTV can also be used to verify alarms.

[†] See Painter and Tilley (1999) for a description of CCTV in a variety of settings.

3. Hardening targets. Increasing vulnerable houses' security can reduce victimization.[82] Home security surveys or target-hardening assessments may prevent burglaries, but these are often requested by residents at the lowest risk for burglary. Even then, residents are unlikely to fully comply with all crime prevention advice. Those whose houses have been burglarized or who live near a burglary victim are most likely to follow such advice.[83]

Security assessments typically include target-hardening advice related to locks, windows and doors. Importantly, such advice–provided immediately after a burglary–also helps the victim secure the break-in point, to deter a repeat offense.

Target-hardening makes getting into houses more difficult for burglars, and includes installing the following: sturdy doors with dead bolts; window locks, rather than latches; double-pane, storm or divided light windows, or laminated glass that is forced-entry resistant; pin locks on windows and sliding glass doors; and sliding glass door channel locks or slide bolts. Generally, moderate lock security should suffice, as there is no evidence that more elaborate lock security reduces burglary.[84] Door security may be influenced as much by the door's sturdiness as by its lock. Regardless, residents should *use*, rather than simply install, security devices.

Some residents install bars and grills on windows and doors, but the aesthetic costs deter many residents from doing so. Installing them may violate building codes and pose a safety threat by blocking fire exits.

If target-hardening is too expensive, corporate sponsors may be solicited to fund it.[†] New construction may also incorporate target-hardening (see response 9).

Target-hardening can be enhanced through victim education, as well as public awareness campaigns that encourage likely victims to take precautions, and that increase offenders' perceptions of risk. Such efforts may be carried out through the media, through the police (e.g., going door-to-door), or through Neighborhood Watch or other community groups.

4. Marking property. Property-marking efforts have had mixed results. It is difficult to get citizens to have their property marked. This response appears to be most effective when combined with extensive efforts to enlist participation,[††] and with extensive media warnings to burglars that disposing of marked property will be more difficult, or that its value will

be reduced.[85] As part of this response, police must ensure that recovered property is carefully evaluated to detect marking. Property can be marked with bar codes, engraving, dyes and etching liquids, labels, and electronic tags. In some initiatives, citizens post window decals to warn potential burglars that their property is marked.

5. Increasing occupancy indicators. Most burglars avoid encountering residents, and thus look for indicators of occupancy. Such indicators include interior and exterior lights left on (or intermittently turned on and off via timers), closed curtains, noise (e.g., from a television or stereo), cars in the driveway, and so forth. Dogs, alarms and close neighbors can serve as substitutes for occupancy. There are also mock-occupancy devices, such as timers that suggest someone is home. In addition, residents should avoid leaving clues that they are away (e.g., leaving the garage door open when the garage is empty). Before going on vacation, they should have their mail stopped (or ask a neighbor to pick it up), and ensure that their lawns will be maintained in their absence.

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A dog's presence in a house is an effective burglary deterrent.

6. Creating safe havens. Home security can be obtained through physical design, such as in gated communities or limited-access "fortress societies," where security guards are supplemented by alarms and video surveillance.[86] Those who have the economic resources can create such safe havens by retrofitting existing communities or developing new ones. Such communities enhance feelings of safety and produce modest crime reduction benefits. Some police feel that these designs slow response time and make patrolling more difficult.[87]

7. Improving visibility. Many features that make houses vulnerable to burglary (e.g., isolation) cannot be changed. However, improving houses' visibility increases the likelihood that burglars will be spotted–or deters burglars who perceive greater risk.

Since burglars seek houses with cover, residents should remove obstructions to visibility. Generally, they should trim trees and shrubs and modify fencing so that such features do not block the view of the house from neighbors or passersby. Well-planned–particularly motion-activated–lighting may enhance such measures' effectiveness.

Increased lighting may increase natural surveillance in darkness: however, its impact on crime is highly context-specific. If no one is around to spot a burglar–for example, at an isolated house–increased lighting is unlikely to stop the crime, and may actually make the burglar's job easier. In some areas, enhanced street lighting has reduced residential burglaries:[88] depending on the neighborhood, it may reduce fear and encourage greater pedestrian traffic, increasing opportunities for natural surveillance. In some cases, the benefits of increased street lighting have extended to daylight hours, presumably because of increased awareness and community pride.[89]

8. Implementing Neighborhood Watch (NW) programs.
Police have often launched NW programs in response to residential burglary, but the offenses have not consistently declined. NW varies widely, but primarily involves neighbors' watching one another's houses and reporting suspicious behavior. Many NW programs include marking participants' property and assessing their home security to harden targets (see responses 3, 4 and 13). However, many NW participants fail to mark property or follow target-hardening advice,[90] although NW works best when they do so.[91] NW has most often been implemented in low-risk areas with more affluent homeowners.[92] NW has a greater impact when there are some residents at home during the day.

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Neighborhood Watch programs have not proved to be particularly effective at reducing residential burglary.

NW effectiveness can be enhanced by offering introduction kits to vulnerable new residents; publicizing the program, including posting stickers on windows or doors, and/or signs on residents' properties or in the neighborhood; educating residents through door-to-door campaigns; marking property; conducting security assessments; and keeping residents informed about crime trends. (Police departments are increasingly providing citizens access to crime data and crime maps via Internet websites.)

"Cocoon watches" are a variant of NW. Neighbors living near recently burglarized houses are asked to be particularly alert. This close set of neighbors–usually, about half a dozen–form a virtual cocoon around the house,† increasing the likelihood of detecting a burglar who returns to strike again. In Kirkholt, England, with a burglary victim's consent, neighbors were informed about the offense and offered a security upgrade–increasing awareness about the crime and, perhaps, neighborhood vigilance.[93]

Educating residents about crime prevention is an important element of NW. Since many residential burglaries do not involve forced entry, simply securing one's house can prevent crime. In areas where burglars *are* the neighbors, watchfulness has different implications. Residents may be intimidated by offenders, and concerned about retribution.

Other means to increase citizen watchfulness, although unevaluated, include the following:

• **Audible warnings:** During Operation Bumblebee, London police drove around and issued warnings over a public address system whenever a certain number of burglaries occurred in an area.[94]

- **Reverse 911 systems:** Autodialers have been used to notify residents when burglaries have occurred, offering crime prevention tips and/or seeking information about offenders. In Baltimore County, Md., use of an autodialer resulted in the quick apprehension of offenders.[95] The use of autodialers can be enhanced through mapping, to establish burglary patterns and thus set boundaries for residents who are called.
- **Resident hotlines:** In limited areas, residents may use hotlines to report a suspicious person ringing doorbells under the pretext of looking for someone.[96]
- **Publicity:** Media campaigns may enhance the benefits of any crime prevention initiative. Such campaigns have rarely been evaluated, but some studies suggest media coverage deters offenders and encourages citizen participation.[97]

9. Modifying building codes. Modifying building codes to comply with best crime-prevention practices is a promising means to reduce burglaries.[98] In Chula Vista, Calif., police worked with developers to modify new homes, including installing dead bolts on garage service doors, windows with forced-entry resistance, and pin locks on sliding glass doors. In addition, homeowner association rules for new developments require that garage doors be kept shut. These measures resulted in a 50 percent decline in burglaries over two years in a police reporting area.[99] In Overland Park, Kan., a municipal ordinance was adopted to secure all exterior doors to reduce forced entry through door kicks, a common entry method in the jurisdiction.[†][100] The increased costs of crime-resistant materials are a primary consideration for builders; however, high-growth communities may reap substantial benefits by modifying building codes.

[†] Overland Park building codes and crime prevention ordinances can be found at www.opkansas.org. Security measures are also written into Simi Valley, Calif., building codes; the police department inspects new houses for compliance. The measures resulted in a 52 percent decline in burglaries from 1974 to 1995 (Hoffman 1998).

Building codes vary from one jurisdiction to another, and builders may use low-quality security hardware and building materials. Forced-entry provisions in building codes can be used to improve window and door security–at relatively low cost, generally.[101] The Peel Regional Police in Canada found that modifying building codes (at the provincial level) was a difficult task, but such modifications may be practical in other settings.

10. Modifying community design. To address the burglary risk in growing areas, some jurisdictions have adopted community design principles. Two studies have shown that a U.K. effort known as Secured by Design has reduced burglary. The Secured by Design strategy involves limiting traffic access by building developments on cul-de-sacs, creating greater oversight around a single road entry into neighborhoods, maximizing the opportunity for natural surveillance through strategic window and door placement, orienting dwellings to maximize oversight of areas, limiting access to dwellings through site layout, and outfitting houses with good locks and building products.[102] Such designs also remove or minimize the risk typically associated with corner houses.

11. Reducing traffic access. In Florida, modifying streets and closing roads resulted in a decline in burglaries.[103] Such changes should take into account both vehicle *and* pedestrian movement–road redesigns will do little to deter burglars who live in the immediate area. Eliminating pedestrian paths, under some conditions, has reduced residential crime.[104]

12. Reducing house access. Home security may be enhanced by limiting access to houses–for example, by installing gates in alleys that provide rear access, and installing fences or planting tall hedges to limit access where visibility cannot be improved. Although fences may limit visibility on

some properties, thus hiding a burglar, full-height fences secured with locked gates can make property access much more difficult, and hinder a burglar in carrying away stolen goods. Some plants–such as thick shrubs, or those with thorny foliage–deter perimeter access to properties and to parts of houses where visibility cannot be improved. Pyracantha and yucca are examples of such plants; appropriate plant selection varies based on climate and available light and water.[105] In England, extensive efforts have been undertaken to secure private alleys, as many burglars gain access to homes through rear entries.[106] Although gaining consent to install gates in alleys has been challenging, and, at the time of this writing, no evaluations were available, installing gates is felt to be very promising in reducing burglary. Some access-control measures can also be incorporated into community design (see response 10).

Victim-Oriented Responses

13. Protecting repeat victims. Because repeat victims account for a large proportion of residential burglaries–and because subsequent offenses occur so quickly after the first–burglary prevention strategies targeting this group have tremendous potential for reducing crime. A range of burglary prevention efforts in Britain have been effective in reducing revictimization,[107] but most of these efforts have focused on public housing or row houses, rather than the detached single-family houses addressed in this guide. It is reasonable to believe, however, that crime prevention strategies targeting repeat victims would have similar positive effects in the United States.

Households with prior victimization are easily identified via police offense reports.† Residents–once victimized–are highly motivated to comply with crime prevention advice. Programs targeting repeat victims have employed a range of prevention measures,[108] such as:

- repairing and securing break-in points,
- hardening the targets,
- establishing cocoon watches,
- installing mock-occupancy devices,
- increasing police patrols,
- installing audible or dummy alarms,
- installing temporary silent alarms (lent by the police to victims for up to two months),
- increasing outdoor lighting, and
- posting window or door stickers advertising participation in property marking.

To be most effective, these measures–or others–must be taken quickly, within 24 hours if possible, before another burglary occurs.

Offender-Oriented Responses

14. Targeting repeat offenders. Police often know who repeat offenders are. Surveillance of stolen-property outlets, such as pawnshops, can identify them. Some police have conducted observations and curfew checks of offenders under court supervision.[109] Truancy reduction initiatives may be a component of this strategy. Given the high rates of recidivism, burglars are likely to reoffend. In one study–of primarily semidetached dwellings–arresting repeat offenders (and hardening targets) resulted in a 60 percent decline in burglaries.[110] Targeting repeat offenders has produced more indictments and convictions, and longer sentences.[111]

15. Disrupting stolen-property outlets. Pawnshops have historically been outlets for stolen property, but their popularity has declined in recent years due to the use of hot sheets circulated by police; mandatory photographing of pawners; requirements that pawners provide identification, and that pawnshops record the information; and factory–stamped identification–or owner-marked identification–on products such as televisions and other electronic equipment.

In cases of recurring thefts of specific property (such as laptops), more extensive property marking (such as Smart Water[†] or genetic fingerprinting) or tracking equipment may be used to monitor theft and stolen property's end destination.[112] Recurring thefts may also point to repeat burglars.

A range of strategies can be used to disrupt markets for stolen goods, especially hot products, primarily by reducing the number of markets available. Such strategies include targeting fences and publicizing arrests for selling stolen goods.[113]

16. Providing substance abuse treatment. Because substance abusers may resort to burglary to finance their habits, providing targeted treatment may result in a decline in offenses. In Merseyside, England, providing methadone treatment reduced burglaries.[114] The relationship between drug use and property offenses is well established. Early studies of police crackdowns on drugs–especially heroin–showed dramatic declines in burglary.[115] (Other drugs have been more closely associated with violent crime.) Studies of substance abuse treatment–both voluntary and involuntary–demonstrate declines in criminal activity, declines that remain after completion of treatment.[116]

[†] Smart Water is a concealed dispenser of indelible dye that can be used with a silent alarm. It may be best used to target repeat offenders or high-risk locations.

† In recent years, the U.K.'s Home Office has produced a wealth of information about police best practices regarding burglary reduction. See, for example, Tilley et al. (1999), Bridgeman and Taylor-Brown (1996), and Chenery, Holt and Pease (1997). Much of the literature is available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimred ucpubs1.html.

†† See, for example, Brown et al. (1998) and Reno (1998).

17. Improving initial police response and follow-up investigations. Efforts in Britain suggest that measures to increase arrests of offenders result in substantial crime prevention.† Most measures are part of comprehensive strategies, making their specific impacts impossible to evaluate. They might include the following:

- **Improving patrol response to burglaries.** In one study, in-progress calls accounted for 10 percent of all reported residential burglaries; in 90 percent of those cases, the police did not apprehend an offender at or near the scene. Of the offenders apprehended after an in-progress call, 43 percent were caught at the scene, and 34 percent were caught based on information witnesses provided. In this study, faster and two-unit responses to in-progress calls resulted in the arrests of more offenders.[117] (Most burglaries, of course, are not reported in progress and police make most arrests based on the responding officer's initial actions. Cases should be screened to exclude those with low solvability.[118])
- **Analyzing crime patterns.** Crime analysis is used to identify series, spatial and temporal patterns, type of property being stolen, and modus operandi patterns. Mapping is becoming particularly useful for detecting burglary patterns and examining local burglary problems.†† Since burglary is often neighborhood-specific, maps should reflect neighborhood boundaries and major topographical elements that effectively separate residential areas.
- **Improving physical-evidence collection.** Widespread access to the Automated Fingerprint Identification System in the United States has provided new potential for matching latent prints–and increases the need for evidence collection. Although many crime scenes provide no physical evidence, those that do can lead to increased arrests of offenders, or provide supporting evidence.[119]

- **Building intelligence databases about suspects**. Using confidential informants can be a cost-effective way to get information about chronic offenders. Anyone arrested may be a potential informant; other informants may be recruited.
- **Conducting surveillance.** Surveillance is very expensive, but may be used strategically. For example, police in Edmonton, Alberta, mapped the geographic occurrence of 240 daytime burglaries over seven weeks, and predicted areas likely to be targeted. Using surveillance, they soon apprehended two offenders during a break-in, and subsequently linked them to more than 123 of the burglaries.[120]

Police should assess investigative practices for their utility and cost-effectiveness. However, crime prevention initiatives including a range of these practices have resulted in reductions in burglary.

Responses With Limited Effectiveness

18. Increasing criminal sanctions. Given the low burglary-reporting rates (about 50 percent of offenses are reported), low clearance rates (about one in eight reported offenses are cleared), and low conviction rates (about two-thirds of offenses result in a conviction), the chance of a burglar's getting caught and sentenced is about 5 percent. One study suggested that, despite increased penalties, burglars are not less likely to offend. Increased penalties deter offenders only if combined with greater perceived risks or fewer anticipated rewards.[121]

Convicted burglars, especially habitual offenders, already face stiff penalties. Once convicted, about 80 percent of burglars are incarcerated; the average prison sentence is five years. Of all property offenders, burglars receive the longest prison sentences.[122]

19. Providing generic crime prevention advice. Most people are never victims of burglary, and generic crime prevention advice is usually adopted by those who need it the least. Providing such advice–including conducting home security surveys requested by residents–absorbs much police time that would be better focused on houses at higher risk. Studies in Britain have demonstrated that target-hardening of dwellings not previously victimized–those determined to be at risk–is simply not effective.[123]

Appendix: Summary of Responses to Burglary of Single-Family Houses

The table below summarizes the responses to burglary of single-family houses, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
Situational Crime Prevention Responses					
1.	26	Installing burglar alarms	Increases burglars' risk of detection; deters burglars if alarms are overt; increases arrests if alarms are silent or covert	…triggered alarms are promptly investigated	Expensive; high percentage of false alarms; burglars may disable alarms or work quickly
2.	27	Installing closed-circuit television (CCTV)	Deters many burglars; increases burglars' risk of detection and arrest	…cameras are well positioned and not easily disabled	Expensive, but costs are dropping; can be motion- activated; provides investigative evidence; complements burglar alarms
3.	27	Hardening targets	Makes it more difficult for burglars to break in	…houses are not well secured	Deters opportunistic burglars; residents who need it the most may not be able to afford security measures

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
4.	28	Marking property	Makes it more difficult for burglars to dispose of goods	…desirable property can be marked	Requires residents' participation and investigative follow-up; publicity increases the benefits
5.	29	Increasing occupancy indicators	Gives burglars the impression that residents are home	…burglars are deterred by occupancy	Some burglars use tactics to confirm occupancy
6.	30	Creating safe havens	Increases burglars' risk of detection through a combination of security measures	…perimeter and entry points can be controlled	Expensive; might displace burglaries to lower-income neighborhoods
7.	30	Improving visibility	Increases burglars' risk of detection	…there is someone around to spot a burglar	Inexpensive; does not work if no one is around or if witnesses fail to act
8.	31	Implementing Neighborhood Watch (NW) programs	Increases burglars' risk of detection	…there are well-established neighbor relations and residents can detect strangers	Difficult to ensure participation over time; residents must be at home during vulnerable periods
9.	33	Modifying building codes	Makes it more difficult for burglars to break in	…residents and developers willingly comply with the codes	Not always expensive; the results are not immediate
10.	34	Modifying community design	Increases burglars' risk of detection and makes it more difficult for them to break in	…design changes can be incorporated into new developments	May have a long-term impact
11.	34	Reducing traffic access	Increases burglars' risk of detection	…burglars do not live in the neighborhood	May inconvenience residents

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
12.	34	Reducing house access	Makes it more difficult for burglars to break in	…visibility cannot be enhanced	Can be tailored to individual properties
Victim-Oriented Responses					
13.	35	Protecting repeat victims	Decreases victims' risk of further burglaries, and increases burglars' risk of detection	…burglaries are concentrated at a few addresses, and strategies can be implemented quickly	Combines prevention and detection; cost-effective; targets the people who need help the most
Offender-Oriented Responses					
14.	36	Targeting repeat offenders	Increases burglars' risk of detection	…there is a small, identifiable group of chronic offenders	May include truancy programs, tracking probationers and others, or high-level surveillance
15.	37	Disrupting stolen-property outlets	Makes it more difficult for burglars to dispose of goods	…the stolen goods are in high demand	Requires continued monitoring of markets for stolen goods
16.	37	Providing substance abuse treatment	Helps offenders overcome their addiction, reducing their need to commit burglary to get money for drugs and/or alcohol	…effective programs can be developed and provided to chronic offenders	Expensive; may be difficult to target the right people
17.	38	Improving initial police response and follow-up investigations	Increases burglars' risk of arrest	…the current police response is not adequate	May require an extensive review of police practices and resources; may be effective if strategic

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
Responses With Limited Effectiveness					
18.	39	Increasing criminal sanctions	Raises the penalties for burglary, and reduces its rewards	…burglars are chronic offenders	Most convicted offenders already face stiff penalties
19.	40	Providing generic crime prevention advice	Makes it more difficult for burglars to break in	…residents follow the advice	Difficult to target those who need it the most

Endnotes

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40 Waller and Okihiro (1978); Budd (1999).

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61 Shover (1991); Wright and Decker (1994); Miethe and McCorkle (1998).

62 Shover (1991).

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Deborah Lamm Weisel is an assistant research professor and the director of police research in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at North Carolina State University. Her portfolio includes research on police responses to crime problems such as gangs, street drugs and graffiti, as well as community policing, safety and security in public housing, and repeat victimization from burglary and robbery. Her work has been published in *Justice Quarterly, Public Management,* the *NIJ Journal,* and the *American Journal of Police.* She holds a doctorate in political science/public policy analysis from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Recommended Readings

- *A Police Guide to Surveying Citizens and Their Environments*, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1993. This guide offers a practical introduction for police practitioners to two types of surveys that police find useful: surveying public opinion and surveying the physical environment. It provides guidance on whether and how to conduct cost-effective surveys.

- *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers*, by John E. Eck (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001). This guide is a companion to the *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* series. It provides basic guidance to measuring and assessing problem-oriented policing efforts.

- *Conducting Community Surveys*, by Deborah Weisel (Bureau of Justice Statistics and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1999). This guide, along with accompanying computer software, provides practical, basic pointers for police in conducting community surveys. The document is also available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.

- *Crime Prevention Studies*, edited by Ronald V. Clarke (Criminal Justice Press, 1993, et seq.). This is a series of volumes of applied and theoretical research on reducing opportunities for crime. Many chapters are evaluations of initiatives to reduce specific crime and disorder problems.

- ***Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing: The 1999 Herman Goldstein Award Winners.*** This document produced by the National Institute of Justice in collaboration with the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Police Executive Research Forum provides detailed reports of the best submissions to the annual award program that recognizes exemplary problem-oriented responses to various community problems. A similar publication is available for the award winners from subsequent years. The documents are also available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij.

- ***Not Rocket Science? Problem-Solving and Crime Reduction***, by Tim Read and Nick Tilley (Home Office Crime Reduction Research Series, 2000). Identifies and describes the factors that make problem-solving effective or ineffective as it is being practiced in police forces in England and Wales.

- ***Opportunity Makes the Thief: Practical Theory for Crime Prevention***, by Marcus Felson and Ronald V. Clarke (Home Office Police Research Series, Paper No. 98, 1998). Explains how crime theories such as routine activity theory, rational choice theory and crime pattern theory have practical implications for the police in their efforts to prevent crime.

- ***Problem Analysis in Policing***, by Rachel Boba (Police Foundation, 2003). Introduces and defines problem analysis and provides guidance on how problem analysis can be integrated and institutionalized into modern policing practices.

- ***Problem-Oriented Policing***, by Herman Goldstein (McGraw-Hill, 1990, and Temple University Press, 1990). Explains the principles and methods of problem-oriented policing, provides examples of it in practice, and discusses how a police agency can implement the concept.

- ***Problem-Oriented Policing and Crime Prevention***, by Anthony A. Braga (Criminal Justice Press, 2003). Provides a through review of significant policing research about problem places, high-activity offenders, and repeat victims, with a focus on the applicability of those findings to problem-oriented policing. Explains how police departments can facilitate problem-oriented policing by improving crime analysis, measuring performance, and securing productive partnerships.

- ***Problem-Oriented Policing: Reflections on the First 20 Years***, by Michael S. Scott (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000). Describes how the most critical elements of Herman Goldstein's problem-oriented policing model have developed in practice over its 20-year history, and proposes future directions for problem-oriented policing. The report is also available at www.cops.usdoj.gov.

- ***Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News***, by John E. Eck and William Spelman (Police Executive Research Forum, 1987). Explains the rationale behind problem-oriented policing and the problem-solving process, and provides examples of effective problem-solving in one agency.

- ***Problem-Solving Tips: A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder Through Problem-Solving Partnerships*** by Karin Schmerler, Matt Perkins, Scott Phillips, Tammy Rinehart and Meg Townsend. (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1998) (also available at www.cops.usdoj.gov). Provides a brief introduction to problem-solving, basic information on the SARA model and detailed suggestions about the problem-solving process.

- ***Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies***, Second Edition, edited by Ronald V. Clarke (Harrow and Heston, 1997). Explains the principles and methods of situational crime prevention, and presents over 20 case studies of effective crime prevention initiatives.

- ***Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems: Case Studies in Problem-Solving***, by Rana Sampson and Michael S. Scott (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000) (also available at www.cops.usdoj.gov). Presents case studies of effective police problem-solving on 18 types of crime and disorder problems.

- ***Using Analysis for Problem-Solving: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement***, by Timothy S. Bynum (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001). Provides an introduction for police to analyzing problems within the context of problem-oriented policing.

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