

Buildings

Intruder alarms, security lighting, doors, windows and access control systems

- **Intruder alarms**

Alarms are the best deterrent against burglary.

Some people think that an intruder alarm system advertises that you have something worth stealing - this is not the case. Remember, burglars do not want to be seen or heard so time and noise are their enemies.

The alarm industry is governed by inspectorate bodies similar to the 'Gas Safe Register' who oversee the gas industry. By choosing a company affiliated to one of the recognised inspectorate bodies such as the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) or Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB), it guarantees that they have met the high standards and business ethics required to be members.

Generally, there are three different types of alarm system response:

1. A monitored system which provides a police response - if the alarm is activated it signals to the alarm receiving centre who will contact the keyholders and the police. The alarm company will charge an ongoing fee for this facility, on top of the initial installation.
2. Speech dialler - if the alarm is activated, the system dials out to a selection of pre-programmed keyholder telephone numbers (not 999) to alert the recipient. The alarm company will charge a one-off purchase price for the speech dialler, on top of the alarm installation.
3. Audible only system - if the alarm is activated, it will sound, but relies on neighbours and passers-by to respond

All alarm systems must stop sounding and re-arm themselves after 20 minutes.

DIY systems are also available, but are not eligible for a police response.

An alarm company will usually fit an active alarm bell box at the front of the building (which has a sounder and a flashing light) and a dummy bell box at the rear. Due to the fact that most burglaries occur at the rear of the premises, it is good practice to have an active alarm bell box at the rear as well. This will ensure that if a burglar compromises the rear boundary security, they will clearly see that the premises is alarmed, no matter what time of day or night.

- **Security lighting**

Good lighting can be an excellent deterrent against burglary, but the right lighting has to fit the right circumstances.

Security lights that operate by heat and movement sensors, are often activated by small animals, so can increase the fear of crime. They can be a useful addition to the front of a house, so that the lights are activated when visitors approach the front door or the householder is returning home at night.

The more appropriate option for the rear of a property is a low wattage security light that activates by photoelectric cell, automatically switching on as it gets dark at night and switching off as it gets light in the morning. They are commonly referred to as 'dusk until dawn' security lights.

- **Windows and patio doors**

Most newer patio doors have multi-locking mechanisms, but extra surface mounted patio locks and an anti-lift device to prevent them being lifted from their runners can be added to older doors to provide additional security and reduce the leverage points.

Windows are a common point of entry. Burglars tend to either force them open, remove the external beading or reach in through smaller fan light windows to open larger windows.

Ideally, windows should be internally beaded to prevent the glazed units being removed. External beading is sufficient if the glazed units have been secured in place with either security clips, security tape or sealant. Window handles should operate shoot bolts into the frame to provide more than one locking point.

If multi-locking handles aren't fitted, surface mounted, key operated window locks will provide additional security and reduce the leverage points.

All ground floor windows and any windows that are easily accessible above ground floor, should be made secure and have key operated window locks, unless they are being used as a fire escape.

Louvred windows are particularly vulnerable, as the individual panes can be removed from the frame. The panes should be secured in place with sealant or totally replaced with a fixed glass panel.

Internal fixed or collapsible security grilles can be used to protect vulnerable windows.

If windows are being replaced, the recommended standard for enhanced window security is British Standard PAS24.

- **Doors and access control systems**

If your front, rear and side doors are insecure, so is your home. It is also important to ensure that the frame is strong and well fixed, not weak or rotten.

If doors are being replaced, the recommended standard for enhanced door security is British Standard PAS 24, which incorporates the door and frame as a door set.

UPVC and aluminium front doors should have multi-locking systems. If not, additional deadlocks can usually be fitted retrospectively. It is important to lift the multi-locking handle and lock it with a key, to prevent burglars reaching in through the letterbox to open the door.

Wooden front doors should be solid timber, a minimum 44mm thick, supported by three 100mm hinges, a British Standard 5 lever mortice lock fitted about a third of the way up the door and an automatic deadlocking rim latch, about a third of the way down.

The frame can be strengthened on the inside by fitting metal strips ('London' and 'Birmingham' bars) to support the locks and hinges. If the front door opens outwards, fit hinge bolts to reinforce the external hinges.

Glass panels in the door can be reinforced with security film, fixed diamond mesh grilles or replaced with laminated glass.

Door viewers allow householders to see who is at the door without having to open it first and door chains provide a barrier against callers.

An internal letterbox shield will prevent intruders fishing through the letterbox to open the door or for keys to the house or vehicles parked on the driveway.

UPVC and aluminium rear doors should have multi-locking systems. If not, additional internal surface mounted locking throw bolts should be fitted to the top and bottom of the door to reduce the leverage points.

Consider all the entry points to the building.