



WHEN A BURGLAR STRIKES

If your company is burglarized, here are things you can do to guarantee a thorough investigation and increase the odds the thief will be caught.

by Steven Scarborough

Most company owners would prefer not to think about it, but thousands of businesses are burglarized every day. It happens about once every 49 minutes in the U.S., accounting for more than \$4 billion worth of property losses each year.

If your business is robbed or vandalized, you can help the police and your business by taking an active part in the investigation.

Many police departments, especially those in metropolitan areas, are overworked, and have little time for crimes like break-ins and

vandalism. They will visit the scene and try to find the culprits as well as your missing property, but they don't always have the manpower or resources to follow-up on every crime, no matter how important it seems to you. Here are some suggestions from veteran police investigators from around the country on how you can help.

1. Don't be a hero

Never make an attempt to confront a thief, either during or after the crime. If you are working late or arrive early to discover your business

has been broken into, do not enter the building; the thief may still be hard at work. Leave your building immediately and go to a nearby phone to call the police.

"Few burglars actually carry weapons," says retired Burbank, Calif. policeman Joseph Dahlia, now a chief of security. "But you don't want to corner the one that does. Commercial burglars are more often armed than residential burglars."

2. Secure the scene

Make sure every area that has been disturbed is preserved and remains untouched by employees.

It's natural to want to prepare for the business day and have the cleaning crew tidy up, but don't. "It may be embarrassing to leave products or papers strewn about the business," says Henry Truszkowski, Las Vegas Metro Police identification specialist, "but touching them could destroy evidence."

Don't clean up broken glass. Glass from a window or door that is broken to gain entry is a good surface for fingerprints.

3. Call at once

Notify the police as soon as the break-in is discovered. "The best time to catch criminals is within 48 hours of the crime," says Dahlia. While you are waiting for the police to arrive, start listing missing items. List especially those missing items you think can be easily pawned. Open drawers or move items with a long screwdriver or thin object to avoid obliterating fingerprints. Don't use a handkerchief to touch things. You won't leave fingerprints but you may damage fresh prints on a surface.

Give a copy of the list to the responding police officer, and ask for a supplemental report form, which you can use to add items you might discover missing later.

4. Record serial numbers

Give police the serial numbers of missing items, whenever possible. The FBI keeps a record of stolen items in its National Crime Information Network, which is accessible to all law enforcement agencies. The police can add your items such as tools, machinery or office equipment to the database and see if it turns up later among recovered items.

According to New York FBI agent Arthur Vallejo, entries can only be made with a serial number. "The faster the NCIC record is made, the better your chance of retrieving stolen

The silent warning

A monitored security system with silent alarm can ensure that a break-in will be detected and reported while in progress.

"We will slow (thieves) down, we will detect their presence, and we will respond accordingly," says Connie Pederi, sales and marketing manager for Gillmore Security Systems, Cleveland, Ohio.

Gillmore has been listening in on—and notifying police of—break-ins for 20 years. Its trademark blue-and-white signs, conspicuously placed in yards or windows, serve as fair warning to would-be Pink Panthers: "if you break in, we'll be listening."

When activated, a Gillmore system will report a break-in or fire to the company's control center. The control center operator then notifies local authorities.

A special zoning feature identifies which entrance has



Connie Pederi

been forced. The alarm also sends a silent emergency signal if it is somehow disarmed.

The alarm also reports any malfunction of sensors, wiring, power loss or low battery.

Pederi says installation of a security system can take two or three days, depending on customer needs and the size and construction of the building.

—Terry McIver □

goods," says Vallejo.

5. Call in forensics

Insist on a fingerprint technician. The responding officer is there to get the facts; he's not a fingerprint or forensic expert. He may even decide that you have no items to process for fingerprints. But it's yours and your company's property, and you can request an expert to decide if fingerprints can be found.



HOW BURGLAR-PROOF IS YOUR PLACE OF BUSINESS?

	(CHECK ONE)		SCORE FOR "YES" ANSWER
	Yes	No	
1 Do you always lock all exterior doors at closing time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15 points
2 Are your windows protected by well-anchored bars or grilles, and are all miscellaneous entries such as skylights, sidewalk openings, cellar entrances, and transoms locked securely when not in use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15 points
3 Is the interior of your place of business adequately lighted during the night after closing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15 points
4 Is your safe visible from the street through your front window?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15 points
5 Do you have Yale pin-tumbler locks with deadlocking features on all exterior doors and do you have double cylinder pin tumbler locks on all doors with large panes of glass?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15 points
6 Have you a good burglar alarm system, and is it inspected regularly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10 points
7 Do you always leave your cash register unlocked with drawer open after closing time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5 points
8 If you use a night watchman, have you had him carefully investigated and is he thorough in his duties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5 points
9 Do you keep up-to-date lists of serial numbers of valuable merchandise?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5 points
My Business Protection Score Is:	<input type="text"/>		100 points*

* A score of 90 or better indicates you are doing a good job of foiling burglars; a score of 85 means that you are doing a fair job; a score of 80 or less means that your place of business may become a burglar's delight.

Go around the area, noticing exactly what was touched by the burglar and where he may have gained entry. This will help to show the fingerprinting specialist exactly where to process for fingerprints. "A crime victim really helps when they know exactly where the burglar has gone within the business," says Truszkowski.

After your initial examination, be prepared to show the technician exactly what was touched and where

the burglar has gone within the business. Occasionally, a burglar is caught by leaving his fingerprints in unusual places, such as in the washroom or on the coffeemaker.

6. Ask your neighbors

Burglars often hit one to five businesses at a time, so the intruder probably tried to enter other businesses in your area.

"There are so many burglaries

A simple way to thwart drive-by theft

Theft can also occur on the road, when the distractions of the job take crews' attention away from the truck.

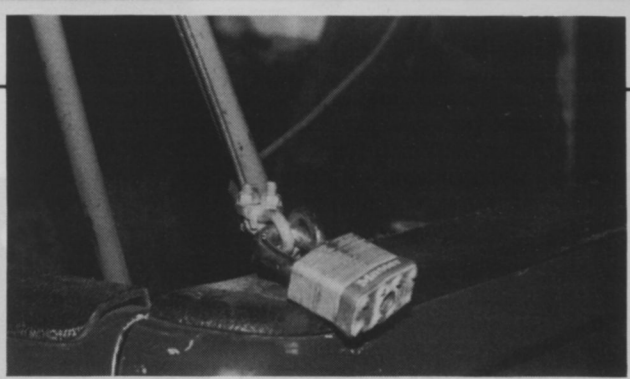
Herrick Mann's company, H.A.M. Landscaping in Warrensville Heights, Ohio, has been hit in the past by drive-by thieves, who have gotten away with string trimmers.

To thwart such robberies, one of Mann's men rigged up a simple but effective cable and lock contraption. The cable runs through the handle of each piece of equipment in the truck bed, and is locked to the truck body.

At the home base, Mann has installed motion detectors and other theft prevention/detection devices.

Smaller—but expensive—equipment, such as aerators or seeders, are locked in a separate cage.

In addition to serial numbers, Mann engraves each



Lock and cable device foils theft.

piece of equipment with his Social Security number. This leads to immediate identification by authorities.

"It resulted in a call at 2 a.m.," says Mann, "but it was worth it."

According to Mann, if authorities suspect an item is hot, they can easily call the social security number up on the computer; the number leads them to the owner. □

each day our detectives do not have the time they would like to devote to each one," says Truskowski.

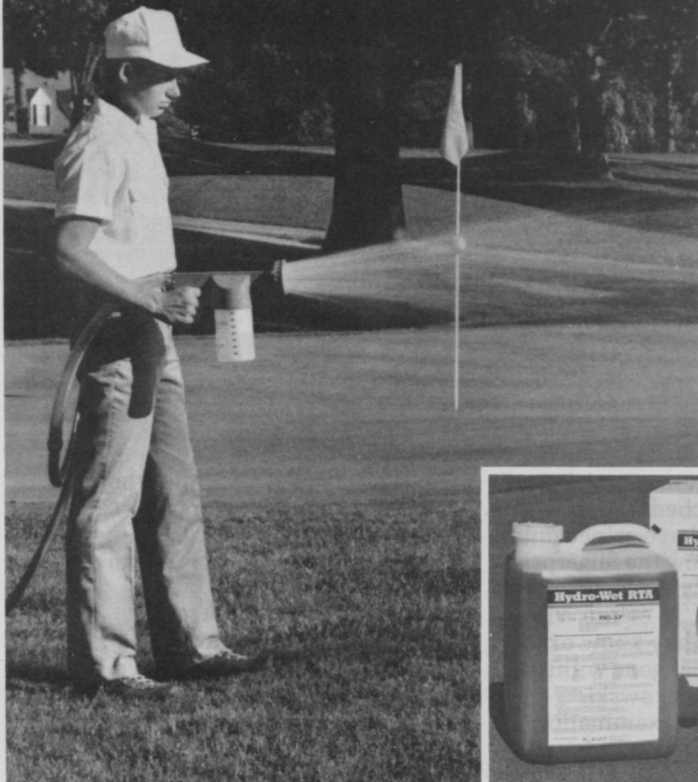
Someone might have seen an unfamiliar car or van and recall the license plate number; or a bystander may provide a description of a suspicious-looking character. You can't automatically count on people to come forward and get involved. If you learn anything that can be of help, talk to the police and let them decide if it's worth pursuing.

Keep in contact with the detective assigned to your case. If he knows you are actively interested in his progress, he'll probably be interested in it, as well. Although no civilian should play detective, you can also keep an eye open for your property at local swap meets and pawnshops. Burglars don't want your property; they're after money, and will quickly sell the items they steal for cash. Persons who pawn items must sign an information

card. If you do learn the name of a suspect in your burglary, immediately contact the detective and have him check out what you have found.

As difficult as it may seem, if your business is ever burglarized, try the positive approach. By taking an active role, you may recover some peace of mind if not your business's stolen property. The best attitude you can take is, "let's do what we can to catch this criminal." **LM**

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