

# Rural Crime Prevention

## Farmhouse Security

Farmhouses are particularly vulnerable to crime when they are left unattended. Houses that are large and in isolated places, being some distance from the road or not in line of sight of the neighbors, are easy targets for thieves. Across Washington, there has been an increase in break-ins to farm houses with everything taken, even the food in the cupboards. Many farm homes have valuable antiques, guns, and other items that are attractive to thieves.

Homes are vulnerable when occupants are elsewhere on the property, go to town, or are away for any period of time, for example, to go on vacation. Many weekend or hobby farms where owners are absent for weeks at a time can be subject to crime.

There are some precautions that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of break-ins when you are away from your home for any length of time.



### Create signs of life

One of the most effective strategies for securing a vacant home is to make it appear as if someone is at home. 'Signs of life' can easily be created.

- Keep blinds and curtains in normal positions. Many people have the habit of completely closing blinds and curtains before leaving home.
- Don't advertise that you are away. Do not leave notes on the door for relatives/friends or for your suppliers.
- Have a dog or two near the house. A good watch dog deters thieves.

### Be security conscious

- Walk around your house and yard area. Look at ways to gain entry to your home as if you were a thief. Identify places where thieves could break in and make them more secure.
- Do trees planted as windbreaks surround your entire yard? These make a good screen for criminal activity to take place. Confine windbreaks to just one side of your yard.
- Ensure doors and windows are of solid construction and lock them when you are away.
- Fit quality deadbolt locks on your exterior doors. If the lock is within reach from a window or opening consider key-operated on both sides of the lock.
- Install window locks on all ground floor exterior windows.
- Don't leave tools and garden implements in the yard. Lock them up in a garage or shed.
- Keep firearms in a secure locked steel cabinet securely bolted to the floor. Store ammunition separately.
- If you keep cash or jewelry in your home, a floor safe is a good idea.
- Ensure household items of value are marked with an identification number. Engraved markings make it easier for the police to identify and recover your property if it is stolen.
- Use a security marking device to mark items with your driver's license number and "WA" for your state.
- Anything of value should be marked and listed on an inventory: televisions and entertainment equipment, computer equipment, antiques, guns, tools, musical instruments, artwork and furniture. Most items can be marked with an engraving tool. Other items can be marked with an invisible ink marker.
- Store your inventory of valuable items in a safe place. A safety deposit box is excellent.
- Photograph or video tape your most valuable items alongside a ruler to indicate size.
- Periodically update your inventory or update it when you make purchases of new items.

## Lighting

Automatic timer devices make it possible to turn lights on and off in a vacant house. There are several types available. Set these timers to reflect your normal living patterns – on in the evening and off during the daytime. Consider using a timer on your television too.

Install security lighting around your home focused on the yard to illuminate both the house and the yard. You can control these lights with either a timer or motion sensor. **Thieves hate bright lights!**

## Other Options

Video surveillance cameras are also an option to ensure identification of thieves. Thieves often come to a house and knock to see if someone is home. If no one is around, they then take what they want. It is important not to use a cheap videotape or camera. Too often when a theft occurs, all that is available on the videotape is 'snow'.

You can display security stickers on your doors and windows around your home as warning that you have a security system in place. Consider forming a Neighbor Watch group in your area. Neighborhood Watch signs are available to display on your property boundary.

## Insurance pays

It is very important to have adequate insurance coverage. It pays to have full coverage against theft of vehicles, equipment, and valuable livestock, as well as the contents of your buildings. Advice from your insurance company is usually free – whether it's about insurance, or how to make your farm more secure.

## When you go on vacation

- Lock and secure all outside doors and windows, to include outbuildings if possible.
- Lock all chemicals, tools, and equipment in sheds.
- Advise relatives or a trusted neighbor of your plans. Ask them to report suspicious activities. Make sure they know how to contact you while you are away.
- Ask someone to inside and around your home periodically while you are away.
- Avoid hiding keys for those who will check on your home. **All the usual thieves know all the usual hiding places!** Give the keys directly to the person that will be checking on your home.
- If there have been break-ins in your area, notify the police of your travel plans. Ask them to check on your property if possible.
- Hire someone to 'live-in' while you are gone, but let your relatives and neighbors know who is supposed to be at your home.
- Have someone pick up your mail, or have the Post Office hold your mail. Stop newspapers while you are gone.
- Lower the volume of the ringer on your telephone – not to give away no one is there to answer it.
- If you have an answering machine – do not say you are away from home. Say you are not available to come to the phone and will return the call as soon as possible.

**For More Information:  
Contact your local Sheriffs Department  
or,  
Washington State Department of Agriculture  
(360) 902 - 1800**



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