

BURGLARY/THEFT PREVENTION



I'm Sergeant James Kotewa. I have been a police officer in the City of Fairmont since 1997. During my career in Fairmont I have held several positions including patrol officer, narcotic agent, and detective prior to becoming a patrol sergeant. Through my experience as a police officer, I have seen too many times where people have become victim of a crime when it easily could have been avoided.

Every year, residents of Fairmont and Martin County fall victim to persons who steal from others. Two major areas of local theft that I want to share with you today are residential/garage burglaries and thefts from vehicles.

Nationally, the estimated 2.1 million burglaries committed in the United States in 2004 accounted for approximately 20 percent of reported serious crime. Two of every three burglaries in 2004 were come committed in residential areas. Be aware that the majority of these burglaries occurred during daylight hours, while non-residential burglaries typically occurred at night.

Burglary is expensive to the victim. In 2004, victims experienced an estimated total loss of \$3.4 billion. The average dollar loss per residential burglary was approximately \$1,600.00 and non-residential burglaries slightly higher.

Nationally, about 65 % of all burglaries occurred when a perpetrator forced a door or window to gain entry. Locally, more of the victim homes and cars may have been left unlocked or unprotected. Most houses and apartments are protected by simple and relatively ineffective door and window locks. Modern hardware is available for these locks which will stop the amateur and slow the experienced burglar. In communities of every size since 2004, the number of burglaries and financial loss to victims point to the continued need for vigilance.

Target hardening, or protecting vulnerable areas of your home and property by means of physical security devices, is an excellent starting point for reducing the likelihood that your house or apartment will be burglarized. Fairmont Police encourage everyone to use any or all of the following methods to avoid being victimized.

- Lock all doors and window when leaving the home unattended, even for a short while.

- Keep large sums of cash in banks and expensive jewelry in safe deposit boxes.
- Keep your landscaping directly around your home small. This avoids areas where people may be able to lurk around.
- Do not hide keys under the doormat, in a flowerpot, or on top of the electricity meter box outside the house.
- Do not leave notes outside of the house announcing your absence from home.
- Leave a light and radio on at night to give an impression that occupants are home.
- Cancel all mail or newspaper when you are away from home for a few days.
- Change all locks when your house keys are lost or stolen.
- Asking your immediate neighbors to keep an eye on your house while you are away can be very beneficial.

Usually about this time of year, there is an increase in another area of theft that is common in our communities, theft from vehicles. There are many items that thieves will take from vehicles. Common items taken from vehicles are: car stereo, CD's, cellular phones, radar detectors, expensive sunglasses, briefcases or gym bags, "laptops", tools, checkbooks, credit cards, garage door openers, and even small amounts of change. The Minnesota Crime prevention Association recommends some simple tips to avoid theft from vehicles:

- Keep your valuables in one bag that can easily be brought with you.
- Lock your car.
- In you can afford a car alarm system, get one and use it.
- Park under a street light or where your car may be easily seen.
- Police patrols alone do not prevent this crime. Practice good crime prevention strategies to minimize your chances in becoming a victim.
- And again, ask your neighbors to call if they see something suspicious.

We often receive calls on suspects who are going through cars. We know they look over several cars to find one that contains valuables. If you take the proper steps, you can make sure your car is one that is passed over.

Finally, always remember to call 911 to report suspicious people or activities. We have often learned of neighbors who watched a theft occur, but didn't want to bother us in case it was false. Trust your instincts and suspicions and call us. 911 is the best number to call police, Fire, and Ambulance services. Don't worry about placing a 911 call, as the dispatchers prioritize incoming calls based upon level of emergency. This suspicious person may be going to victimize you or your neighbors. .

The officers of the Fairmont Police Department want you all to feel safe and secure in and around your home. We urge you to take the steps now to greatly decrease your chance that someone would invade your home or car and take your personal possessions.