

East Division

Neighbourhood Watch Newsletter

Issue 4 (October 2015)

Crime Prevention



Welcome to the 4th edition of our East Division newsletter. To support Operation Castle we have concentrated on crime prevention advice in the run up to the festive season. Operation Castle is our stop burglary initiative and it will run from mid-October to the end of November. Some of the advice contained in the newsletter may seem obvious but we would like you to reinforce it as a large percentage of the crime we read, and disseminate to you, each day, is avoidable by simple measures being taken to protect property. We have mentioned some commercial companies who provide security advice and products, these references are advisory only and please do not take them as endorsements from Kent Police.

Effective ways of preventing the loss or damage of your property

General advice on making your home more secure

- Lock doors and windows when you go out or work in the garden – if you have uPVC windows or doors then double-lock them with the keys to secure them properly.
- Never leave keys or valuables on display near windows or doors.
- Avoid keeping large amounts of cash or valuables at home.
- Consider fitting intruder alarms, door chains, a spy hole and external lights (see our recommendation re alarms/CCTV).
- Don't open the door to unexpected callers – use a door chain and check their identity first.
- Dispose of packaging carefully – wrapping and boxes for expensive items can advertise rich pickings for criminals.
- Use timer switches on lights and radios to give the impression someone is home. Put these on lights in places other than the hall way alone. Timers are not expensive and can be bought in most large DIY stores.
- Ask a trusted neighbour to keep an eye on your property while you are away.
- Don't advertise on social media sites that you are away by posting pictures/images of your location.

Property Marking

Items such as laptops/tablets, games consoles and mobile phones can be easily stolen and quickly passed on. Security-marking your property could help to deter thieves as well as increase the chance of the police being able to return your items if they are lost or stolen. There are a number of different ways of marking your valuables.

- Ultra violet (UV) or invisible marking – UV pens put an invisible mark on your property that can only be seen under a UV lamp. Permanent UV marker pens are available from most stationery or hardware shops. (Staples, Amazon, Post Office online shop). Pens cost as little as £1 or up to £4 for a pack.

- Damage marking – Garden equipment, heavy electrical items and power tools can be marked with a painted sign, making them easier to identify and deterring thieves. Florescent paint can make ownership more obvious and reduce the resale value of the item, thus reducing the likelihood of theft and/or adding to the risk of storage and disposal. Paint your postcode and the first two numbers of the house or business or the first two name letters.
(Source: <http://www.virtualbumblebee.co.uk/Display/Marking.asp>)
- Engraving or etching – Both methods are suitable for many hard surfaces and can be done using an electric engraving tool or hand engraver. Many online stockists such as Amazon and ebay sell engraving tools and also the Homebase store.
- Ceramic marking – Ceramic marking pens are designed to mark china, glass or glazed surfaces. They do not cut or scratch the surface but do leave a permanent mark. Suppliers include online retailers www.bakerross.co.uk and www.hobbycraft.co.uk.
A pack of 10 marker pens costs £3.99 online and paints on ceramic and glass.
- Forensic marking solutions – These harmless solutions are invisible to the naked eye but contain a unique forensic code (like a fingerprint) that remains on the marked item, clothes or skin, making it easier to trace stolen goods or offenders back to specific crimes or locations. For more information go to www.smartwater.com/property-marking

Key Benefits

- No two solutions contain the same forensic code - making your assets uniquely identifiable.
- It is easy to apply and is almost impossible to remove, it is guaranteed to last for a minimum of 5 years outdoors, giving you long term protection.

Smartwater kits are available from Kent County Council wardens, who can also give you further advice on crime prevention and home security. Details of your KCC warden are available on the KCC website at www.kent.gov.uk (put the words community warden into the search box) or telephone number 0300 041 4141

Important: Keep a record of valuable items (both hard and electronic copies). Keep hard copies in a safe place and ensure that all PCs, laptops, tablets etc. are password protected and files stored securely and not given file names which would give an intruder clues as to what is in the file. Make a note of expensive items including the make, model, serial numbers and any details that may help identify them if lost or stolen. Keep receipts somewhere safe in case you need them later. Photograph your valuables including any items that you do not want to security-mark, paying special attention to any distinguishing marks such as initials or crests. Photographs should be taken against a plain background and include a ruler to give an idea of size/scale.

It is a good idea to register your property on a property database such as www.immobilise.com which works with the police to trace owners of lost/recovered stolen property.

Alarms

The Metropolitan Police Office says that studies have shown a well-fitted and maintained burglar alarm system makes you less likely to become a victim of burglary, source: <http://www.which.co.uk/home-and-garden/home-improvements/guides/burglar-alarms-and-home-security/burglar-alarms>. Insurance companies, your local Neighbourhood Watch Association or PCSO can recommend approved local alarm companies who can offer you quotations.

The national NHW and Homewatch website, 'Ourwatch', www.ourwatch.org.uk works with the National Police Chiefs Council (senior police officers) and promotes the recognised security standard for all home security products such as windows, locks and doors. In association with the Police Chiefs Council, Secured by Design (SBD) is the official UK Police initiative that focuses on crime prevention for homes and commercial premises. SBD works with the industry creating security standards that are proven to reduce burglary by 75%. www.securedbydesign.com

Lighting

Lighting with timers, movement or night sensitive switches on external doors, gardens etc. will deter thieves. Specialist light boxes that flicker like a TV can be purchased quite cheaply and will make a good deterrent. Here are just a few retailers that sell security lighting products (B&Q, Homebase, Argos, Wickes, Maplin). Externally - low level LED bulbs can stay on from dusk until dawn and are cheap to run, the Secured by Design website has more detail. Internally - Philips Hue light bulbs can be controlled by smart devices. The starter kit can be viewed at philips-shop.co.uk.

Locks

Deadlock doors and close and secure lockable windows if you go out or upstairs. Unlocked UPVC units can be sprung. Keep keys away from doors and windows in a place where they are not visible to anyone looking in, and don't hide them outside. Fit an entry viewer and/or a good door chain or door bar. A letterbox cage will prevent lock release or theft via the letterbox. Change locks in new houses so only you have keys. Don't give keys to anyone you do not know well. The Master Locksmiths Association (MLA) licenses its approved locksmiths through a process of vetting and checking. Visit the MLA website to search for an MLA approved and registered locksmith. www.locksmiths.co.uk. A five-lever mortise deadlock for a front door costs £21.99 and an automatic deadlocking rim lock £40.99, both from Screwfix.

Cat and Dog flaps

Burglars can and have accessed properties via cat and dog flaps, either by putting their arms through them or by using crude devices to lever open doors and undo locks. Don't leave keys in the lock or on a side table or hook near the door but keep them in a safe place in case of emergencies. If you have a lock on the flap then consider using it at night and when you are away from home. These locks may not be burglar proof but more of a deterrent for other animals entering the property. If you have moved into a property with a cat or dog flap, which you don't need, it might be advisable to have it removed and/or replace the doors.

Wheelie Bins

Homeowners also need to be aware of the potential risk of burglars using wheelie bins to gain access to properties. The large wheelie bins are able to support the weight of an average man standing on top of it. This enables burglars to climb on to the wheelie bins in order to scale fences and gates, or using them as stepping stones onto flat-roofed garages so they can get into first-floor windows. Wheelie bins should ideally be placed at the rear of the property or behind side gates until the day of collection, to prevent them being used as climbing aids. Alternatively secure them away from flat roofs and side gates by running a substantial chain and closed padlock through an eyebolt. If you are at work all day uncollected bins are a clear indication of property being empty, once collected ask a trusted neighbour to take them in.

Defensive plants, shrubs and trees

Shrubs: Ground cover shrubs with prickles can be used to keep people away from things or make people walk along a particular route. Some shrubs/small trees that can be useful for hedging barriers and some for growing over walls and fences to make climbing impossible or at least very difficult.

Trellis fencing: This is effective because it increases the height of the boundary and it is not usually strong enough to hold an intruder's weight. Therefore, they may not want to risk climbing over it, breaking it and making a loud noise. It allows a level of visibility for monitoring.

Please be aware: Using barbed/razor wire and broken glass in order to stop people getting in to your home can be done but it is not advisable. You are making yourself liable to civil action as you owe a duty of care to ensure that visitors to your property are reasonably safe. This would also include trespassers. Signs that read "Trespassers will be prosecuted" are meaningless as you cannot be prosecuted for trespass - it is a civil wrong, not a criminal offence. It's therefore more accurate to have a sign that reads: "Keep out - private property. You are trespassing." This will give the householder some legal protection in the event of an adult intruder injuring themselves however a child, young person or person with learning difficulties may not be able to read or understand a sign so insure you have nothing on your property which could lead to injury and open you up to compensation claims.

CCTV

It is perfectly legal to use CCTV on your property as long as due care is taken. Most people who choose to install CCTV at home do so primarily to deter would-be intruders from trespassing onto or breaking into their homes, and this is completely legitimate. Using CCTV at home can often help police secure a conviction for crimes that have been committed, such as a theft of a car parked outside your home or to identify individuals who are engaging in Anti-Social Behaviour.

However, if you have a camera which is pointed directly at another person's property or it's suspected that it can capture part or all of a neighbour's property; this may cause problems under the Human Rights Act 1998. All cameras should be fitted with robust anti-tamper housing to reduce interference and vandalism. Signs depicting CCTV in operation can be displayed to warn that CCTV is in use to act as a deterrent. The signs should be large enough to be easily seen. Both the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) and the British Security Industry Association (BSIA) list companies that meet essential satisfactory standards. Stockists of CCTV equipment include: Maplin, Screwfix, Argos and you can also find further information for recommended companies online through the British Security Industry Association www.bsia.co.uk and the National Security Inspectorate www.nsi.org.uk

For simpler options you may want to look at Guardcam, stockists include; Amazon, Ebay, www.spotonsatellites.com, www.tlc-direct.co.uk

These products are fitted to homes and have an inbuilt recording system with removable memory card.

For example: ESP GuardCam Security Light CCTV Camera System With Voice Alert

Features include:

- Clear image recording in video or still frame format. Night images retain colour and clarity due to automatic halogen light illumination.
- GuardCam has the option to deliver one of three messages upon activation. "Warning you are trespassing", "Warning you are being captured on video" and finally a barking dog

Panasonic also has a system which allows you to monitor your home remotely from a smart device. To view the Panasonic Smart Home safety starter kit (home hub, window sensor and motion detector cost £129) view their website smarthome.store.panasonic.co.uk.

Identity theft

Identity theft is when somebody pretends to be you. They may do this in order to buy things in your name and leave you and your bank with the bill. There are many ways that someone can steal your identity, including:

- Finding out your bank details
- Taking your passport or driving licence, or copying the details
- Copying your credit card details
- Accessing your personal information through a fraudulent website or email
- Taking junk mail that has your personal information on it
- Going through your dustbin to find receipts or other information

Once the fraudsters have the required information they will be able to open bank accounts or get credit cards and loans in your name. They may also use copies of your passport or driver's licence to conceal their identity and commit further crimes. Stealing an individual's identity details does not, alone, constitute identity fraud but using that identity for any of the above activities does. Source: www.actionfraud.police.uk

If you suspect that you have been a victim of identity theft you should contact your bank immediately. The bank will report the crime to police if you have not already done so. Also phone your credit card company who will be able to block your card and alert retailers. You should report all lost or stolen documents – such as passports, driving licences, credit cards etc. to the relevant organisations. Contact the Royal Mail Customer Enquiry line on 08457 740 740 if you suspect your mail is being stolen or that a mail redirection has been fraudulently set up on your address. The Royal Mail has an investigation unit that will be able to help you. You may not know straight away that your identity has been stolen. It is important that you protect your details and be aware of any signs that your identity might have been stolen. Always check statements thoroughly and keep receipts and invoices in a safe place so they can be cross-referenced later. Dispose of all sensitive documents carefully, investing in a paper shredder to destroy statements and letters with personal information on them. Stockists of shredders include Argos and Staples.

Useful Contact Numbers

Police: Dial 101 - Non-urgent crime, anti-social behaviour or general enquires. If you need to contact your Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) dial 101 and ask for an appointment.

Dial 999 - Emergencies only, if your life (or that of another) is threatened/in danger or if a crime is in progress

For advice and to report issues to Kent Trading Standards: www.kent.gov.uk/business/trading-standards
Call 03454 04 05 06 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm) Textphone 18001 03454 04 05 06 (Calls are answered by Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline) www.adviceguide.org.uk

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65 www.ageuk.org.uk

www.police.uk

www.actionfraud.police.uk

www.spotonsatellites.com

www.tlc-direct.co.uk

www.locksmiths.co.uk

www.securedbydesign.com 020 7084 8962

www.ourwatch.org.uk

www.immobilise.com

www.smartwater.com/property-marking

locksmiths.co.uk 01327 262 255

Kent Police and the Metropolitan Police websites also contain security advice.

Kent Police www.kentpolice.uk/advice

Metropolitan Police content.met.police.uk/site/crimeprevention