

An Garda Síochána

Crime Prevention Information Sheet



Home Security Windows



Window Security

More than a third of burglars will enter your property through a window. Windows will come in a variety of designs, styles and materials which are commonly one of the following -

- Casement
- Tilt & Turn
- Sliding Sash
- Fan light
- Velux
- Louvre

Glazing incorporated in window frames is equally varied and is usually annealed, laminated or toughened.

All will be designed to admit light but it is important to remember that windows are a favoured entry point for thieves. You can assess their individual vulnerability which will depend on three main factors:

- The accessibility of the window
- The visibility of the window to neighbours or passers-by
- The quality of the fabrication, strength and installation of the window

We can reduce their attraction as an entry point for the burglar by trying to minimize these risk features.

The accessibility of the window

Remember a thief can generally get through any gap that is slightly larger than a human head – so don't be complacent about their security because of the window size. Windows on the ground floor are more vulnerable than those on the upper floor levels. However upper windows that can be easily reached with a climbing aid, via down-pipes or from an adjoining roof are equally attractive to the burglar. Some of these windows can be protected with decorative metal grilles; but it is important to remember that any such fixing should not form an obstruction in the event of an emergency evacua-

tion. Where these grilles are fitted, they should ideally be fitted internally and be retractable or removable as required. Window accessibility and security can also be improved by fitting additional locks, limiters or stronger glazing.

The visibility of the window to neighbours or passers-by

Windows at the rear and side of premises are more susceptible to criminal attack than those which are clearly visible to others. Make full use of external lighting to illuminate the external approaches to these windows during darkness. Unnecessary visible obstruction can also be caused by overgrown trees or hedging. Overgrown branches or hedging that can restrict the natural line of sight by casual observers should be pruned.

The quality of the fabrication, strength and installation of the window

Not all windows are the same. Good design features, quality fabrication and installation can provide a level of security far beyond the capabilities of the average burglar. The modern approach to window security assesses resistance to forced attack of the whole product and not just the component parts. Good security locks can be fitted to inherently weak frames. Similarly, quality frames may be fitted with glazing of inadequate strength. In some instances, quality windows are poorly installed into the building.

There are many different windows on the market today and all will have some security features. The quality of the products, however, can vary considerably. Some can include multi-point locking, reinforced frames, external security beading and laminated glazing, but exaggerated claims about their security can be made. With enough time and effort any window can be forced. What you are buying in security terms should be windows of sufficient strength and quality to stop or deter the common methods used by burglars to break and enter through them. The extra time and investment you make

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in purchasing quality windows will pay real dividends when it comes to securing your home or business.

For example, on the market today, the current British security standard for windows is BS 7950 'Windows of Enhanced Security' which means the windows have been independently certified to offer a high degree of protection and be "attack resistant" generally beyond the capabilities of the average burglar. No compatible Irish Standard presently exists in this category; however, some European or global standards may be compatible. Windows falling outside the scope of the British Standard should demonstrate compliance with an alternative European or global standard e.g. ENV 1627. This should be discussed with your installer.

The BS 7950 is the standard for '*Windows of Enhanced Security*' for testing a **newly fabricated whole window**, comprising lock manipulation, glazing security, mechanical loading and attack testing. It is not a test of individual component parts which, however excellent, could then be installed into an otherwise poor window. BS 7950 certificated windows, therefore, also offer the consumer additional protection because they are independently tested and assessed for performance and security. These are currently available in PVC-U, hardwood, softwood and aluminium.

External Beading

Many modern double-glazed windows are fitted with external beading with no security features. This beading can easily be pried away and the glass panel lifted out. The security of these windows can be improved by fitting additional security features - discuss with your local glazier/window company or your local crime prevention officer.

Window Locks and Limiters

You can still improve your window security on older windows; however, it is always advisable to seek professional assistance before adding security locks or special glazing to existing windows to ensure any security alteration or additions will not weaken the window frame or structure. It is also advisable to talk to the fabricator or installer beforehand to ensure any warranty you may have is not compromised. Home security and DIY shops sell inexpensive, key-operated locks to fit most kinds of windows. You may need more than one window lock, depending on the size of the opening you need to secure. More vulnerable windows can also be fitted with "limiters" to restrict the size on the opening.

Annealed Glass

Annealed, float or plate glass is the most common type of glass used in buildings. It breaks easily and when broken forms large sharp fragments.

Laminated Glass

Laminated glass consists of two or more layers of ordinary glass bonded together with a strong material called polyvinyl butyral (PVB). It will give excellent protection against accidents, vandalism or burglary. When attacked the glass itself may break but the glazing will

adhere to the PVB bonding layer. The level of protection can be increased depending on the layers and thickness of the glass, however in general for residential protection a thickness of 6.4mm or ¼ inch is sufficient.

Toughened Glass

Sometimes used as an alternative to laminated glass, toughened glass is approximately 8 times stronger than plate glass. It should not be used for security purposes in windows and doors as its main value is as a safety glass. Toughened glass is designed to withstand forced blows; however, it is not impenetrable and the surface can be broken or fractured with sufficient force, usually with a sharp or pointed instrument. If the surface is punctured, the entire piece of glass will disintegrate into small granular pieces.

Fire Precautions

Any physical changes or alterations made to windows in your home should not needlessly impede or restrict your exit in the event of a fire alert or evacuation. This will be particularly important when fitting laminated glass or where windows are controlled by key operated locks. Keys should always be kept accessible to occupants but out of reach of potential trespassers or burglars.

Remember!

When the home is occupied, fire safety is your priority; however, when the home is unoccupied, security is your main concern.

The advice contained in this information sheet is not intended to be exhaustive or absolute. At all times it is wise to seek appropriate professional advice where physical or structural changes are made to your property to improve security.

Nothing contained in this publication should be interpreted as mandatory, obligatory or designed to conflict with any statutory regulations.

Useful Contacts and Links

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An Garda Síochána
www.garda.ie

The National Standards Authority of Ireland
www.nsai.ie

Secured by Design
www.securedbydesign.com

The Associated Locksmiths of Ireland
www.aloi.net

The Master Locksmiths Association
www.masterlocksmiths.co.uk