

HOME SAFETY GUIDE



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Acknowledge the existing danger

Home! Here's a beautiful and comforting word, which should make us feel secure. I, as well as you, my reader think of it as the place where we return from work, holidays or any other place to find peace and warmth.



Well, the truth is crime continues to be a major concern of both citizens and their law enforcement agencies. Statistically speaking, your home is the most dangerous place to be simply because you spend so much time there.

There are over 2 million reported home invasions every year, including burglaries, rapes, kidnappings, murders, and hostage situations. In a 10-year period, you face a 1 in 5 chance that your home will be invaded. Over a 20-year period, the odds are about 50/50 that you'll be the victim of some form of home invasion.

Many people plan for this by purchasing a firearm. Being armed is always a good idea, but a gun isn't the only answer. Preparing for home defense is really about creating layers of deterrence to lower the odds that a bad guy will enter your home. Plus, you need to establish a specific set of actions to take if someone does break in and presents a threat to you or your family.

There are many strategies householders can engage to reduce the risk of becoming a victim, starting with the first line of defense—a security-conscious state of mind. Security-conscious householders think about security as a matter of course, not only when locking up the family home to go on holidays, but as an integral part of daily living; it's the psychological key to ensuring maximum physical security. It is necessary to accept that in a fast changing world, lifestyles change, and security consciousness is now an unwanted but essential part of contemporary life.

There are many strategies we can adopt, to ensure our houses and communities are more secure, and to keep our sense of community intact. The various points of entry to a home are the potential target areas through which a burglar can gain access to your home and valuables. An opportunistic thief looks for the target offering the least amount of security and resistance to reduce his chances of detection.

Every homeowner must take into consideration the weaknesses presented by their home and identify the target areas requiring attention. For example a door with a lock in the knob should be re-enforced with an auxiliary lock. Garage should be secured while the homeowner is away for any length of time.

Now that you are aware of the danger, in order to make sure that you and your family own a *Home Sweet Home*, read on and follow my advice.

Home Defense Basic Guideline

Don't be an easy target

Burglars and bad guys are generally lazy opportunists. They look for easy targets. So if your home looks run down and your property is unkempt, you're sending a message that you're careless and vulnerable.



Mow your lawn and trim your shrubs on a regular basis. Clear debris from your property. Never leave ladders outside, which could be used to gain entry to upper floors or balconies. Clear away loose rocks, bricks, and other small, heavy items that can be used to batter doors or break glass.

Keep your windows shut if you are not home. Get into the habit of locking doors even if you are home. Change the factory code on your garage door opener. If the garage door does not need to be open, then keep it closed. What about your basement windows? Are they reinforced with glass block? Do you have bars over the windows? Ground level windows provide easy points of entry.

Even if you keep up with your home's appearance, a criminal might consider breaking in anyway. So you want to provide some visual cues that make him think twice and, ideally, encourage him to move on.

If you like dogs, get one. A big one. Criminals never want to tangle with a dog. But it's important to make sure anyone casing your house knows you have a dog. A dog house, a big chain, a water or food dish, or dog warning signs are all great ways to send the message. And they can work even if you don't actually have a dog. Yes, your neighbors may know the truth, but bad guys often case a house as they drive or walk by and won't know the difference.

Video surveillance systems also offer strong deterrence. No one wants to get caught on camera. And video systems send a signal that you take security seriously. It can make criminals wonder what other surprises you might have waiting for them.

Security service signs are a popular deterrent. Most security companies include yard signs and window decals as part of their service when you install a new system. Use them. Post signs prominently at key entry points and place decals on first floor windows.

Strengthen all points of entry

Given enough time and the proper motivation, you can enter a house any number of ways. But criminals will almost always use the obvious entry points: doors and windows.

The reliability of your doors depends on the quality of your home's construction. It is shocking how poorly build some homes and apartments really are. A door is only as strong as the frame, so if you're able, check the framing and reinforce it if necessary.

Replace cheap locks with heavy, high-quality deadbolts on all exterior doors.

Dead bolts should go as far into the wood frame as possible with 3-inch screws securing the striker plate to the frame. If you have glass panes on your doors or windows right next to doors, use key-operated deadbolts. Locks with knobs on the inside can be unlocked by simply breaking a nearby pane of glass and reaching inside.

For windows, be sure they are all locked. By their very nature, windows are easily broken. So if you have a security system, consider having sensors connected to each window or using glass break detectors.

You can even use landscaping and lighting to strengthen points of entry. For example, install thorny bushes below windows. Remove low branches on trees that can be used to climb to upper floors or reach a skylight. Remove bushes and trees that provide cover or darkness near entry points. Add landscape lighting, motion-activated lights, or flood lights to brighten and expose entry points.

There is nothing you can do to make your house invulnerable. The idea is to do whatever you can to slow down intruders. Bad guys generally want to get in and out fast. The more time you can make them spend gaining entry, the more time there is to detect their presence, notify authorities, or take other action to protect your loved ones.

Create and practice a home defense plan

Even if you've kept up with your home's appearance, added visual deterrents, and strengthened points of entry, it's still possible for someone to break in. And when they do, you need to be prepared. You and your family need a plan and must be able to execute that plan without confusion or hesitation.

It is difficult to provide specifics on this point, because your plan depends on your particular situation. You must consider the size and layout of your home, how many other people live with you, the ages and abilities of each member of your household, and so on. However here are a few basic considerations.



First, it's wise to have a “safe” room. The relative strength of this room depends on how much money you can spend. It can be nothing more than an extra bedroom that you've secured with a heavy door, thick hinges, reinforced frame, and a deadbolt lock. Or it could be a custom “vault” with hardened walls, survival supplies, weapons, and independent systems for power, ventilation, and communication.

Second, it's vital to be realistic. Your plan should take into account at least 3 different scenarios:

- 1) The break-in happens when you're home

- 2) The break-in happens when you're not home
- 3) The break-in is ongoing when you arrive home.

In each of these scenarios, you must ask yourself vital questions that will affect how you react. Is it day or night? Are you armed? If you aren't carrying your gun, can you get to it quickly? How many attackers will you face? What other family members are involved and what part do they play? Should you escape or run to your safe room?

Finally, practice, evaluate, and make improvements. The simpler your plan, and the more scenarios it covers, the better. Run your plan the way you would a fire drill. Get the whole family involved so that everyone knows what to do. For children, this can even be turned into a game to see how fast you can execute your plan. Just as with anything else, only repetition will enable you to execute your plan efficiently when your home is breached.

Prevention Measures

Deter

Sound residential security practices and good locks are a deterrent since they eliminate the opportunity for an easy burglary.

Detect

The possibility of detection is increased if you can force a burglar to work where he can be observed. A burglar also wants to avoid drawing attention to himself by making noise, such as breaking glass or smashing doors. Alarms on doors and windows are the surest

way to detect a burglar, but watchful neighbors alert to unusual activity who will notify law enforcement authorities are also an effective means of detection.

Delay

Delaying a burglar for four minutes is generally considered sufficient to prevent entry into a residential dwelling. A burglar wants to avoid being caught, so the longer it takes to force a door or window, the greater his risk. It is nearly impossible to make a house or apartment impregnable, but it is relatively easy and inexpensive to make forced entry difficult and to delay the burglar.

By keeping in mind the principles of deterrence, detection, and delay, you will be more likely to deny the burglar access to his target.

This book is designed to aid you in inspecting your home for security. Take time to put your own house in order. Then talk to your neighbors about how you can help each other keep your entire neighborhood safe.

You don't have to be one of the two million residential burglary victims and neither do your neighbors. Remember — crime prevention begins at home.

Always Lock Up

Don't overlook the obvious. Doors and windows should be locked, not only when we leave the house, but when we are elsewhere in the house, on the phone, in the garden, or otherwise preoccupied, away from points of entry.



The main door is the most likely point of entry and should be your first priority. A key-operated deadlock on a solid timber door is the safest option. If intruders get into your house through another entry, a key operated deadlock on the main door will make it more difficult for them to carry stolen goods out. Reinforce the deadlock wherever possible with a security screen, and a peephole, so you get to see any visitors before they see you.

Install the same key-operated lock system on all other doors—it makes locking up and owner entry easier. Security firms can install tamper-proof locks. Sliding glass doors are particularly vulnerable and should be bolted top and bottom or fitted with a specifically designed dead lock.

Secure all windows. No windows are too high or too small for burglars. All windows should be secured with keyed locks or security grills. Lock all upper-level windows, because they are easier to reach than you think.

Sheds and garages are usually the repository of tools and other implements burglars use to assist in a break-in. Keep them padlocked. If there is a connecting door between the garage and your house, ensure it is always locked.

Side gates are easily overlooked. They should also be securely locked, and children and grandchildren educated to always lock the gates behind them.

Do not leave keys outside. Take the keys with you. It may be advisable to leave a spare set with a trusted friend or relative.

Light Up At Night

Keep doors, windows, and pathways well-lit at night. Movement activated sensor lights are highly recommended.

Proper and creative lighting of your premises and home not only makes you feel secure but makes your property safer. If you are away from your house, use timers on various lights within your home to give the 'message' that your residence is inhabited. It can also be useful to leave a radio or TV playing to give the impression that someone is home.



Get a dog

Research shows a family dog deters many potential offenders. Consider keeping a dog. Even if you don't own one, think about hanging a 'beware of the dog' sign at any outside gates. If burglars are casing the place, the prospect of a burglar-unfriendly dog can be good enough reason for many to beat a retreat.

Lock Up the Meter Box

Locking up your meter box prevents thieves interfering with your power supply or security sensor light system. (Consult electricity authorities for further information.)

Prepare For an Emergency

Ensure your house number is clearly visible. If you have to call police or other emergency services, they should be able to find your house quickly. Your house numbers should be clearly mounted on both the front and back of your house.

(Having the house number clearly visible at the rear of your property ensures a neighbor will be able to identify your house, should he or she report suspicious activity at the rear of the house.

Having your house number clearly marked at the rear will also assist police officers that may be approaching the house from the rear to investigate criminal activity.) Program telephone numbers for emergency services, close friends, relatives or neighbors into

your telephone's memory so that in a state of emergency you can summon assistance quickly.

Distraction Burglary

Some burglars try to trick their way in. They may say they are from the water, gas or electric company. They may ask for a glass of water, or to wash their hands or claim to have lost a pet. In fact, they'll use any story they can to get in. They can be young (even children) or old, male or female, and might work alone or in teams.

They often target the elderly. If in doubt, keep them out, particularly if you're on your own. Ask them to make an appointment or come back later when someone else is around. Genuine callers won't mind. If you are suspicious, report the incident to the police. You may help prevent them from burgling someone else.

Remember:

- Lock – keep your doors and windows locked, even when you're at home.
- Stop – are you expecting anyone, do they have an appointment? Make sure the back door is locked—some thieves work in pairs with the other one sneaking in the back while you're at the front door
- Chain – put the door bar or chain on before you open the door.
- Check – check their identity carefully. Ask for an ID card. Close the door and check using a phone number from the phone book or a relevant bill, not the one on the card.

Doors

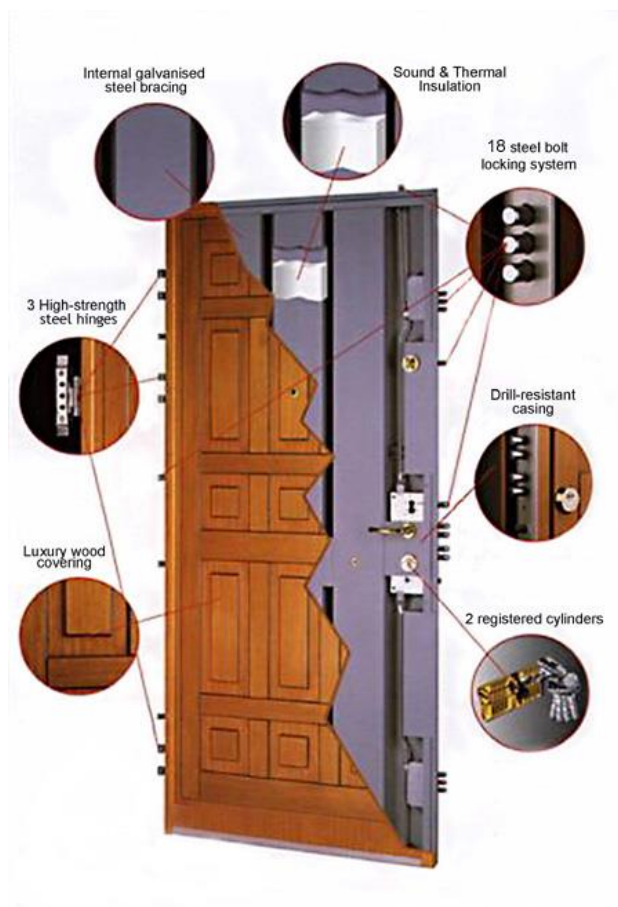
Even the best locks can be defeated by a method known as “spreading” where a wedge or jack-like device is inserted between the two door frames.

This method can often be successful because doors and frames are purchased as single units and are placed into the wall opening provided by the builder during construction. Although the opening between the wall and the frame is braced at the top and bottom with alignment wedges, the midsections are often left open which permits the frame to bow under pressure.

Solid blocks inserted between these openings will help to resist this form of entry.

To strengthen the frame, install 3–4" screws through the doorstop strip and the frame and into the heavier wood of the wall construction. The same procedure should be applied to the hinge side to further reduce an intruder’s ability to spread the door frame.

Install a metal plate on the inside of your door frame, surrounding the strike plate opening. This plate will re-enforce your door frame at its weakest point.



While all the exterior doors must have an equal resistance to forced entrance, the front door is the most important one to make secure.

It is the most obvious, usually the easiest to get to, and is the first one tried by a burglar. The quality of the door is equally as important as the lock installed. Steel doors or solid core wooden doors provide satisfactory resistance against forced entry. Any hollow core door should be replaced or at least reinforced by adding exterior grade plywood on the outside of the door.

A hollow core door is filled with corrugated cardboard and is easily broken through. The panel edge is the weak point in a stile and rail door and should be reinforced with exterior grade plywood. A stile and rail door has stiles and rails as part of the face of the door, the remainder is composed of inset glass or wooden panels which can easily be forced.

Door Locks

Securing the door is the first logical step in the protection of your home against burglary. Therefore the installation of auxiliary locks is a necessary requirement. It must be understood that no lock, no matter how good, can make a house, store or office burglar proof. However, good locks can be an effective deterrent against break-ins. The more difficult the lock, the less likely a culprit is to attempt or to succeed in breaking into a premises.

Double Cylinder Deadbolt

Double Cylinder deadbolt locks require a key to open from either the inside or outside. When you install these locks it is strongly recommended that you keep a key in or near the lock (but out of reach of anyone breaking a nearby window) when you are home, so

that you can exit easily in an emergency, and remove the inside key when you are away.

If you follow these recommendations, double cylinder deadbolt locks will provide you with good home security. In addition to all the strengths of other deadbolt locks, double cylinder locks prevent someone from unlocking the door if they break glass in or near your door and reach in, and they stop a burglar who has entered your home through a window from leaving by the door.

This means it will be difficult for the burglar to take items from your home.

Interlocking Bolt Rim Locks

These auxiliary locks are commonly referred to as “jimmy-proof” locks.

Instead of the normal horizontal bolt, there are two vertically moving deadbolts that lock into the frame-mounted striker so that the lock and striker are firmly interlocked. If it is not necessary to unlock the door from the outside, then the lock can be installed with an inside cylinder only.

These locks are ideally suited to wooden frames or where there are side lights because the striker is mounted on a minimum amount of wood. The jimmy-proof striker is designed to enable fastening in two directions to provide greater strength to the striker plate. The jimmy-proof lock is also available as a double cylinder model.

Keys

Never leave a spare key in a convenient hiding place such as under the doormat, in a flowerpot or behind a loose brick—thieves know

all the usual hiding places. If you move into a new home, change the front and back door locks immediately—other people may have keys that fit.

Look in your phone book for the names of local locksmiths. Never leave your house or car keys in or near a door or window. Some thieves have been known to use a fishing rod or magnet on a stick to steal them through the letterbox. Decide on a safe place for your keys and always use it, so you can find them in an emergency.

Increasingly, burglars are breaking in to steal the keys of high-value cars. So take care of your keys and, if you have a garage, keep your car in it rather than on the drive.

Windows

Most burglaries are carried out by opportunist thieves. In two out of 10 burglaries, they don't even have to use force—they get in through an open door or window. So fit strong locks to your doors and windows and make sure you always keep them fully locked.

If you are replacing windows, consider using laminated glass, particularly in ground-floor and accessible windows, as this is much harder to break. Otherwise, window locks that can easily be seen from outside may put some thieves off, because the thief would have to break the glass and risk attracting attention.

And even if they do break the window, they still can't open it so risk cutting themselves climbing through the broken glass. Home security and home improvement 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.

Fit window locks with keys to all downstairs windows and windows that are easy to reach—for example, those above a flat roof or near a drainpipe.

Even small windows such as skylights or bathroom fanlights need locks. A thief can get through any gap that is larger than a human head.

Remember to keep windows locked. Remove the keys and keep them out of sight in a safe place.

Louvre windows are especially vulnerable because thieves can easily take the slats out of the frame. Glue the slats into place, and fit a special louvre lock. Better still, replace them with fixed glass.

Before fitting locks to PVC-U or metal windows, talk to the installer to make sure this will not affect your warranty.

Casement locks make it harder to open windows without the correct key.

Fanlight locks have a metal bolt to secure the metal arm, which is used to open and close the window. Ideally though, you should not rely on these locks—fit a casement lock too.

The lock shown here fastens the two windows together. A more discreet version is embedded into the wooden frame. Or there are devices to stop the window opening beyond a certain limit.

Double hung windows usually have a top half that can be lowered and a bottom half that can be raised.

Residential Alarms

An alarm can be a positive addition to the security system of any home. The life styles of some families make the installation of some kind of alarm even more necessary. If a home is vacant during the daytime or for the weekend or if the home is situated in an isolated location, it could be considered more vulnerable for a break-in than other homes.

The addition of an alarm system is a good backup to physical security such as auxiliary locks and window security and can help to ensure greater peace of mind for those who must leave their homes unattended for extensive periods of time.

Alarm systems are available in a variety of forms from the basic self-contained unit to suit a simple door or window, (these types are usually available through hardware or electronic stores), to more elaborate systems which can be wired to sound a bell or horn at the residence or at a central monitoring location. This will in turn notify the police.

Make inquiries of several reputable alarm companies before deciding which type to purchase.

Creating a Safe Room in Your Home

Every home should have a safe room as an integral part of your home security plan. This room will serve as the last line of defense against an intruder in your home.

Before you start getting images of camouflaged walls, and barbed wire barriers, realize that this room is a part of your daily life. It could be a bedroom, or a bathroom. The only difference is that you have slightly modified the room to serve as a stronghold to delay intruders until you get help. Although a safe room will not keep your home from being broken into, it will provide an extra measure of protection until the police arrive.



Safe room selection

The first step is to do a survey of your home. Before you spend any money hardening your home, you should run some rehearsals of a break in. As you talk through the rehearsal with your family ask yourself, “Where would I be, or where would I go if my house is broken into?” Although most break-ins occur in the hours of darkness, usually after you have gone to bed, your situation may be unique. If you have children, consider, “Would I run into their room,

or would I expect them to run into mine?”

Moving from your most likely location is the worst thing you can do. It forces you to venture out into a possibly hostile area, and gives the intruder the advantage. But sometimes you cannot help it. Some homes have a “mother-in-law” floor plan, where the children’s bedrooms are on the other side of the house from the master bedroom

Is there a room at the end of a hallway?

This type of room provides the best location for a safe room. It forces the intruder into a natural “choke point” (the hallway). It also limits the amount of interior wall exposed to the intruder. Interior walls are typically nothing more than a bit of Sheetrock and wood. An interior wall has very little bullet stopping power. You can remedy that problem (more on that later) but it is always easier to prevent it.

Where are the most likely entry points into my home?

The front door may seem obvious, but sometimes thieves use the garage or back doors to enter your home. Those points of entry provide a burglar with a usually covert way to enter your home. Although it helps, it is not critical that you can see those entry points from your safe room.

What must be considered is whether or not you have to move past those entry points from your bedroom to your safe room. Is there a covered and concealed route to the safe room? Remember that

concealment hides you, cover protects you from direct fire.

If I am forced to open fire from my safe room, what are my fields of fire?

The use of a firearm is a very personal decision. You must carefully consider all the implications of owning and planning to use a firearm to protect the life of your loved ones. You need to decide now - "Could I take another person's life in order to protect my life and/or the lives of my loved ones?" If you choose to use a firearm, what are your fields of fire? Fields of fire are those areas of your home, outside of the safe room that you can safely fire into without hitting members of your own family. The narrower the field of fire, as in a hallway or stairwell, the easier it will be to hit your target.

If I miss my shot or if it passes through the assailant, where is the projectile(s) going?

What is past your target is extremely important. Look at your field of fire and think of where the bullet will stop if you were to fire. What kind of backstop there is, and what furniture is located in the bullet path. If there is a wall as your backstop, you have to assume that the bullet will penetrate the wall. Go behind the wall and see what your bullets will hit.

Also, ask yourself if you are willing to damage any furniture along the bullet path. It sounds callous, but after the trauma of a break in, you do not want to have to also replace a \$2000 dollar large screen TV or pick up the pieces of an irreplaceable heirloom.

Safe Room Construction

Okay. You have done your rehearsals, gone through the checklist and selected the best possible solution to your situation. Now is time to start building.

The Door

The best place to start constructing your safe room is the door. The door will be the biggest initial expense, but is the most critical element. Remember that you are trying to keep the bad guys from attacking your family. Don't be cheap. The following instructions assume that you have some basic knowledge of the standard procedures used in installing a door. I will not try to teach you how to install a door, or basic carpentry. If you are unfamiliar with the procedures, there are dozens of books on the subject. If you are still dubious about your ability to install a door, show these pages to a handyman or contractor.

Check the door on your safe room and determine if it is a hollow core or a solid door. A hollow core interior door, typically used in bedrooms and closets, will sound hollow when tapped with your knuckles. This type of door is useless. I can easily put a fist through this door, reach in and unlock the door, and come right in after you.

If you have this type of door, it must be replaced with a solid core door. Measure your current door and take the measurements to your lumberyard. Ask for an exterior solid core door in the size that need. Do not waste your money on a steel exterior door. These doors are made of a foam-insulating core sandwiched between two

thin sheets of steel. They are expensive and do not offer any more protection than a solid core door.

The Hinges

Hang the door with three of the heaviest door hinges you can buy. Install the hinges with 3" long screws both to the door and to the doorjamb. Never use the ½" screws that come with the hinges, they are useless. You will have to pre-drill pilot holes, or you will never get the screws in.

The Locks

You will need a door knob and two dead bolt locks. The dead bolt locks should be the type that requires a key from the outside but can be opened with a knob from the inside.

Never install dead bolts that require a key from both sides. You do not want to fumble in the dark looking for the keys to lock your door.

Install the doorknob as usual. Install the one dead bolt lock halfway between the doorknob and the top of the door and install the other dead bolt lock halfway between the doorknob and the bottom of the door. If you can afford the extra money, install two more dead bolts on the hinge side directly opposite to the first two. 4 dead bolts and one doorknob should cost you less than \$100 dollars. Even less if you reuse your old doorknob. The idea here is to make the entrance into your safe room virtually impenetrable by means other than some type of explosion.

Keep in mind that your assailant may try to shoot through the door. Once you have the door shut and locked, do not stand directly behind it.

The Strike Plates

Your dead bolts will be useless if they are installed directly into your wooden casing using the thin strike plate that comes with the locks. Buy high security dead bolt wells. These are heavy steel straps, about 5" long, with a built in well for the dead bolt. They are attached with 3" screws to the casing, and 2" screws to the studs inside of the wall.

The Peep Hole

Install a wide angle peep hole so that it is at eye level while you are kneeling on your side of the door, about four inches from the knob edge. You want to be able to kneel beside the door and look out. You present a smaller target by kneeling. By placing the peephole to one side, you should be able to hide behind the wall and look out the peep hole. Also, a peephole at this level will be ideal for use by children.

Equipment to have in your safe room

In addition to making a secure safe room, you must consider what equipment or supplies you should keep in it. The following list is a basic list. Add to it as you see fit.

Cellular Phone or a separate phone line - A cellular phone is best in case the intruder has cut your regular phone lines.

Flashlight and spare batteries - Consider buying the rechargeable flashlights that you leave plugged into an electrical socket when not in use. Get the kind that come on automatically when the power goes off.

Fire arms and extra ammunition - My personal choice for a safe room would be a 12 or 20 gauge shotgun using 00 Buckshot. You are more likely to hit the intruder.

This is a personal call for you. Use whatever you can reliably hit with.

First aid kit Fire extinguisher

Sign for window - so that emergency personnel know which room you are in by looking from the outside.

Collapsible ladder - If your safe room is on the second or third level, you may need a way to exit through the window.

In addition, since your safe room is, by definition, the safest room in the house, you should store your valuables and important papers in this room. Remember, if the bad guys choose not to enter your safe room, they still have the rest of the house to rob.

Reinforcing the walls

If you have no other choice but to use a room with a sheet rock wall exposed to the bad guys you can armor this wall two ways: Easier: Cut a 2" hole bellow the light switch besides your door jamb. Pour pea gravel or sand, with a funnel until you reach the hole level. Patch the hole with wall patch then sand and paint.

Harder: Cut the same 2" hole. Insert a large garbage bag through the hole. Pour concrete with a funnel into the bag. The bag will expand with the weight of the wet concrete and fill the space between the studs. Patch the hole as above.

Guns for Home Defense

First of all, please be sure to check the pertinent laws in your state, as firearm restrictions do vary. For example, a particular configuration of a firearm that is legal in Arizona may be illegal in California.

Mandatory safety rules to follow:

- Always assure a gun is loaded
- Never point a gun at anything you aren't willing to destroy
- Check your backdrop
- Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot

For purposes of simplicity, let's break this down into three categories – shotguns, pistols, and rifles.

Shotguns:

What gauge?

For those who don't know, the 'gauge'• refers, for all intents and purposes, to the diameter of the barrel and/or the shell.

12-gauge shotguns offer a generous spread (i.e., you don't have to be that accurate) and/or stopping power, depending on the type of ammunition of course.

Second, 12-gauge shells are BY FAR the most common and the easiest to find (compared to .410, 20-gauge, etc.) and often the least expensive. Wal-Mart usually carries everything in 12-gauge from very light loads for hunting birds and clay shooting to 00 buckshot and slugs.

OK, so 12-gauge it is...but what kind of shells should you use?

First of all, just stick to 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ shells (i.e., they sell shells of various lengths). 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ are the most common, and most shotguns can use them.

00 ('double ought') buckshot, which is essentially 7-9 pellets (for a 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ shell) similar in size to a 9 mm bullet, is good, as it offers some spread and SERIOUS stopping power, and decent range (maybe 50 yards or so).

If you want more penetration (but no spread), you may want to consider a rifled slug. One look at the single, large bullet at the end of a slug shell will convince you that IT WILL hurt the bad guy very badly, even IF it passes through him. Slugs may be useful up to 100 yards or so...though it may be hard to hit much of anything from that distance with it.

Yet, one of the concerns with firing at an intruder in your house is what happens to the bullet/pellet if you miss the bad guy, or it goes through the bad guy? Some ballistics tests have indicated that various types of buckshot can easily pass through several layers of sheetrock because of the relatively high momentum of the projectiles.

Therefore, some experts recommend a lighter load if the shotgun is intended only as a “under the bed” weapon. One commonly recommended load is No. 4 birdshot, which has a higher number of smaller pellets compared to 00 buck. While still offering ‘decent’ stopping power, it will spread a bit more than buckshot and really cut down the possibility of injuring a family member in another room or a neighbor.

Another thing to keep in mind is that you can load your shotgun with alternating rounds (e.g., #4 bird, slug, 00 buck, #4 bird, etc.) just be sure to have the series memorized.

OK, so which shotgun should you get?

First of all, most experts I’ve talked to HIGHLY recommend pump action shotguns over semi-automatic shotguns. They are generally considered to be more reliable. Even more importantly, during a home invasion, you have the ability to “politely” tell the bad guys to get the hell out by simple actuating the pump to generate what some consider to be the second most recognizable sound in the world – “CHCK – CHCK.”

The two most common shotguns sold for any self-defense purpose nowadays are probably the Mossberg 500 and the Remington 870 with 18’ barrels. They are usually about the same price (\$300-\$400).

If you are looking to save money and see a good deal on either, go for it – but if you get a chance, check them both out.

For those looking to save some money, one other possibility is the Maverick 88. Mavericks are made by Mossberg, and the 88 is supposedly very similar to the Mossberg 500, but usually costs \$50-\$100 less. The most noticeable difference between the two is the location of the safety. The Mossberg has a slide-type safety on the top of the receiver, and the Maverick, like the Remington 870, has the traditional push-button safety near the trigger.

Personally, I prefer (and own) a Remington 870. It just feels the most solid to me but you really can't go wrong with any of them.

One other thing to note about 12-gauges (and shotguns in general) – if you've never fired one before, they kick like hell. This is especially true when using a heavy (i.e., weight) and/or fast (i.e., amount of gun powder) load, like 00 buck or a slug. Ten shots of either, from a stock 12-gauge, will leave you sore, and probably give you a bruise.

The good news is that a company called Blackhawk makes recoil absorbing stocks (i.e., not just a pad – these things have springs and stuff in them). I have yet to fire one, but supposedly they are amazing. If you shop around a bit (e.g., Ebay), you can probably pick one up for \$100 or so. They make them in both pistol grip and traditional stock shapes. Here are two links to Blackhawk's webpage:

<http://www.blackhawk.com/product/CompStock-Shotgun-Stock,1155,165.htm>

<http://www.blackhawk.com/product/SpecOps-Adjustable-Shotgun-Stock,1158,165.htm>

One final note on shotguns – one other way to minimize recoil, is to use “low recoil shells.” They are essentially the same as regular shotgun shells, but have a bit less gun powder behind them...which not only takes it easy on your shoulder, but minimizes the worries about over penetration into another room or house...BUT stopping power may be reduced.

Pistols (i.e., handguns that use magazines; not revolvers):

What caliber?

OK, what I DON'T want to do is start the ‘which is the best handgun caliber’ debate. So, I’ll just limit this to perhaps the three most common nowadays (at least for pistols, as opposed to revolvers, which is another topic I want to avoid): 9 mm, .40 cal, and .45 cal.

A ‘defense’ type (e.g., hollow point) bullet (as opposed to ‘ball’ or full metal jacket) in any of these three rounds provides plenty of stopping power, unless you’ve got Michael Myers (from ‘Halloween,’ ‘So I Married an Axe Murderer’) after you.

The only other comments I’ll make about pistol caliber:

With all other things being the same “ 9 mm recoils the least, so it’s generally the easiest of the three to stay on target after pulling the trigger, and usually offers higher capacity magazines than the other two but does have the least stopping power. .40 offers (in a defensive round) more stopping power than 9 mm, but usually ‘snaps’ (or recoils) more than BOTH 9 mm AND .45. .45 offers the most stopping power but you’ll generally have to sacrifice a few

rounds of magazine capacity and a bit a penetration (which might be a good thing depending on the situation). There usually isn't THAT MUCH of a price difference between the three, though 9 mm is usually the least expensive and .45 is the most expensive. Note that as of September 2009, .40 cal ammo is probably the easiest to find.

One final comment regarding pistol caliber – over penetration in a home defense situation, IS a concern, especially with FMJ ammo. For a 'nightstand'• pistol, in any of these calibers, a defensive round, such as some sort of hollow point, is STRONGLY recommended, as it increases stopping power significantly and reduces the odds of injuring an innocent party.

OK, so which pistol?

In my opinion, if the pistol is really ONLY for SHTF, a zombie attack, etc., and you are not planning to become a recreational shooter, just go buy a full size Glock in your choice of caliber. Enough said. (Note the other pistols I mention below are essentially other manufacturers versions of the Glock).

However, if it's your first pistol, and you think you MIGHT want to shoot a bit more for practice (which is a really, really good idea) and/or fun, but you still have the SHTF plan in mind, I'd still keep it simple. If you want a full size pistol (as opposed to something for carrying concealed), the first three I would look at are the Springfield XD, Glock, and Smith and Wesson M&P. All three have polymer frames w/steel slides and are double-action only (i.e., no "hammer" – they have internal firing pins, and the trigger pull is always the same). All three are ABOUT the same price (as of September 2009, the XD is the least expensive at \$459 or so if you shop around...the Glock c. \$500...M&P c. \$550). Some people rip on

polymer guns, but they are light, usually relatively inexpensive, easy to care for (all three of these can be stripped down in just a few seconds), and TOUGH (Supposedly, Glocks have been dropped several hundred feet onto concrete and are still able to fire).

My general thoughts/the consensus on these three: In the end, the Glock MAY be the most reliable, and the M&P has the best ergonomics (i.e., it “feels” best in your hand). Overall though, I prefer shooting the XD the best, especially because I think it has the smoothest trigger pull of the three. I own an XD 40 (.40 cal) with a 5” barrel instead of the standard 4”. The extra barrel length makes the gun a bit heavier but reduces the snap a bit (which is not as much of an issue with 9 mm or .45).

That being said, all three are rock solid. You can’t go wrong with any of them.

You MIGHT be able to save a bit of money buying one of these guns used. However, I still recommend buying from a reputable gun shop, for obvious reasons. Besides, the odds of saving a substantial amount of money from buying from a private seller are actually pretty slim.

Also note that some shops (like my local shop/range) sell used, law enforcement trade-ins – often Glocks. At my local shop, these seem to be a pretty good deal, as although the outside of most of them show holster wear, a quick field strip often reveals that the gun has been fired VERY little. In fact, I’ve seen Glock trade-ins that still have some of the original copper-colored lubricant that Glock uses when assembling the pistols at their factory. My local shop sells such Glocks for \$320-\$350.

Safety note – like many pistols these days, none of the pistols I mentioned above have actual “safety” switches per se (at least as STANDARD features). However, they do have other mechanisms to help ensure the gun fires only when intended (e.g., if the trigger is actually pulled and/or is being securely held in your palm, as opposed to the gun being dropped or something – but no actual safety levers).

That being said, I’ll mention one other full size pistol: the FN Herstal FNP. I just picked up a good deal on a nearly brand new FNP 40. It too is a polymer/steel, BUT it has an external hammer and offers a single action and a double action trigger pull. That is, you can either have the hammer cocked and shoot with a short, quick trigger pull OR have the hammer uncocked for a longer, slower trigger pull.

Assuming a round is chambered, the double action trigger pull of the FNP is really it’s only ‘safety.’ It also has a decocker (i.e., a lever that allows you to decock the hammer without firing). If you are OK with (and/or prefer) the single/double action thing, you may want to check them out. Supposedly, quite a few of our service troops carry them now, and I MAY actually prefer it to my XD now.

One final note on pistols – if you want something a bit smaller than you MIGHT want to carry/conceal but still consider SHTF as the primary purpose for having the gun, from what I’ve seen, Glock is the best band for the buck. The Glock 19 (9 mm) and the Glock 23 (.40 cal) have frames that are one step smaller than ‘full size.’ • My sister has a Glock 19, and I shoot it all the time. It’s light and small enough to conceal pretty easily, but big enough that I don’t feel uncomfortable shooting it – and I have pretty big hands. The smaller frame handles 9 mm fine, and the 19 is pretty easy to shoot.

However, because of the extra 'snap' of .40, the Glock 23 MAY be somewhat difficult to shoot without a decent amount of practice (i.e., because of the smaller frame and shorter barrel, the extra recoil of the .40 is more noticeable). The Glock 19 and 23 usually cost the same as the full size Glocks.

Rifles:

If we get to the point that I NEED my rifles to defend myself, we are in SERIOUS trouble (e.g., The Road Warrior). As such, for purposes of self-defense, a rifle should be the 'last'• to add to your collection, in my opinion.

There are a lot of different options when buying a rifle, but keeping this limited to semi-auto, assault type rifles, perhaps the 'most common' for our purposes here, and the easiest to find, seem to be AK-47 variants, an SKS, AR-15 variants, and Ruger 'ranch'• rifles (e.g., the Mini-14 and the Mini 30). I'm not saying these are the 'best', that is, I'm not trying to start the 'which semi-auto rifle is the best' debate.

These rifles can be chambered for various rounds, but USUALLY, AK-47s and SKSs fire 7.62 x 39 mm, as does the Mini-30. AR-15s (usually) and the Mini-14 fire .223 Remington (and/or 5.56 x 45 mm NATO). The distinction between .223 and 5.56 NATO IS important. Some rifles can fire both, some CAN NOT. Be sure to check your rifle!

7.62 is usually less expensive than .223, especially when using 'cheap' stuff like Wolf ammo (see below). As of September 2009, 1000 rounds of steel-cased Wolf 7.62 (hollow point, soft point, or FMJ) can be had for \$250-\$300. 1000 rounds of the 'cheapest'•

RECOMMENDED (see below) .223 will run more like \$350-\$400, but just for FMJ.

It seems to be generally accepted that AKs, and SKSs are built to 'looser' tolerances. Thus, they TEND to be more reliable than AR-15s in that they 'require'• less maintenance and are less finicky about the types of ammo they fire. The Wolf ammo I mentioned above usually works just fine for AKs and SKSs. However, they also are generally considered to be less accurate than AR-15s. These days a new, decent AK variant can be picked up for around \$500 if you shop around a bit.

From what I understand, SKSs are no longer manufactured, but with some luck, you can still purchase an 'unfired'• SKS for around \$350 (note "ten years ago, such an SKS costs less than \$100). Standard SKSs come with a traditional stock and a 10-round 'box'• magazine, which loaded from the top of the gun. However, after market, pistol grip type stocks are available, as are higher capacity magazines (check your state's gun laws!). Between the two, I think it's a coin flip but SKSs tend to be bit less expensive.

AR-15s are usually lighter (depending on the amount of 'toys'• you have on it) and more accurate than AKs and SKSs (though only an issue, if at all, well above 100 yards, if not more). ARs DO require more maintenance (and lubrication) than AKs and SKSs, and are a bit trickier to field strip for cleaning. However, if properly maintained, modern AR-15s are considered by most experts to be very reliable. Ammunition selection is one item that can affect the reliability of an AR. The steel-cased Wolf ammo is also made in .223, but MOST enthusiasts do not recommend using it in AR-15s, as there are many reports of jamming, etc., when using Wolf. 'Higher'•

quality brass-cased ammo is usually recommended for ARs. That being said, I have heard a few accounts of people using Wolf in ARs with no problem. One AR manufacturer, Bushmaster, even claims to test fire their rifles using steel-cased Wolf.

Re using .223 FMJ, as opposed to hollow point or something, for defense opinions vary on this. All I'll say about it is that it appears as though our troops in the Middle East ARE using a TYPE of FMJ .223 (or really the 5.56 NATO).

ARs are also essentially Lego sets. That is, there are countless accessories than can be added to customize it but that stuff adds up (i.e., \$\$\$) quick. Speaking of which, a 'decent' new AR, as of September 2009, can be purchased for \$800-\$900. 'Decent'• is a relative term of course. That being said, I'll go ahead and recommend a couple of manufacturers: Stag Arms, Rock River Arms, Del-ton, Bushmaster, and DPMS. Those manufacturers may not be the best, but they are certainly not the most expensive either.

Note that most of my comments regarding AR-15s are directed at traditional 'direct impingement' AR-15s, not the more modern gas piston variants, such as those made by LWRC which are much more expensive and somewhat heavier.

Regarding the Ruger Mini-14 (.223) and Mini-30 (7.62), these seem to be considered to fall in between AKs/SKSs and AR-15 on the reliability/ease of care vs. accuracy scale. However, I have never fired either. Based on what I know about them, they are fine rifles, but they too cost basically as much as a decent AR.

OK, so after all of that, of the rifles I discussed above, what should you get?

If it's ONLY for SHTF (or a zombie attack!), you are unlikely to start shooting for fun, and if the S does not HTF, the gun is just going to sit in your closet, just get yourself an AK or SKS (and a case or two of Wolf ammo). In all likelihood, you will not NEED any more accuracy, and either one can essentially be 'maintenance free'• (though it is not recommended). Because SKSs are a bit cheaper, I'd probably go that route and maybe add an aftermarket stock and a higher capacity magazine.

Well, let me rephrase the above if you are really concerned about a SHTF scenario to the extent that you want to buy a rifle, you SHOULD get an AK or a SKS, regardless of also buying an AR.

I would only add to your collection with an AR if you are willing to learn how to properly take care it. Don't get me wrong, taking care of an AR is not all that hard, but it is a bit nerve wracking the first time around and they do require proper lubrication, which is supposedly the leading cause of failed operation.

Regarding home defense rifles are generally not preferred in a home defense situation, as they offer only the disadvantages (lack of maneuverability) of a shotgun, without any of the advantages (spread), while obviously being less maneuverable than a pistol.

It should be noted though that some ballistics tests have shown that over penetration for an AR-15 is not the grave concern that it was once believed to be, even with FMJ ammo. Although a .223 bullet it going very, very fast, it is so light that it is easily stopped and/or deflected. This does not mean you should start target shooting in

your living room. It just means that an AR-15 firing .223 is not like the 'rail gun'• in the movie 'Eraser.'• However, over penetration does appear to be more of a concern for 7.62 ammo, because of its weight. Therefore, an AK or an SKS may be even less desirable for home defense.

Final thoughts

The most important lesson I've learned after years of research is that when it comes to home defense, your behavior - either careful or careless - is the crucial factor. And there's NO valid excuse for being careless. Why gamble with your life?

Altogether, you and your loved ones can be the safest in your area. It all comes down to how safe you choose to be.