

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw
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It's six o'clock at night and you are returning home after a long day at work. You pick up the kids at the sitter's home and pull into the driveway, while making plans for supper, homework, tomorrow's schedule and more. As you get out of the car, something catches your eye; the side door of your home is ajar. Still confused about what you're looking at, you move closer for a better look, only to confirm the fears your home has been broken into. You nervously push open the door, while keeping the kids behind you and begin to scan the interior.

Discovering your home has been burglarized brings about a variety of emotions, including anger, despair and fear. Fortunately, the number of homes entered annually in our community is small but seemingly on the rise. Geographically, we are situated near a couple cities with very high incidents of crime and quite accessible with two major highways passing through. We are also living in an era where criminals are becoming bolder and showing little regard for their victims. Contrary to a popular belief, these crimes are not connected with the state of the economy but connected with illegal drug abuse.

If faced with such a situation, which hopefully you never will, there are a few things to keep in mind. Despite your mixed emotions, focus on your safety and go to a safe place. Your initial thoughts will be to start cleaning up but there's always the possibility someone could still be inside. Call 911 and wait for police, either outside or at a neighbor's. Don't touch anything as crime scene technicians may be able to recover valuable evidence, such as fingerprints or hair. Recently a suspect in a past burglary in Amesbury was identified because of DNA evidence recovered at a scene.

If you happen to encounter the person, do not confront him or her. Many burglars are carrying weapons and could be under the influence; protect your family and yourself first. Let them go but get a description, direction of flight and any observations of a motor vehicle seen. Once police arrive, they will enter your home and assure no one is inside before inviting you back in to look around. I'll cover "home invasions", when a burglar enters your home when you are there, in a future "Watchwords" column.

Show police the areas you believe were searched by the perpetrator and provide an initial list of what you believe to be missing. Don't worry about listing everything at this time, a more detailed list can be compiled later. Sometimes it's easy to see where the burglar has been while not so at others. If you have valuables hidden, check to make sure they are still there. If a firearm or other weapon is missing, be sure police are told so. Share any information you may have; perhaps you noticed a vehicle in the neighborhood, someone loitering or even had an unusual guest in your home recently. Surprisingly, many burglaries involve a suspect who had been in the home before and saw something of interest.

Police will check with neighbors as well as other police departments in the area to identify a suspect and bring charges against them. Several Amesbury Officers have also been trained as Crime Scene Technicians, which allow us to gather physical evidence quickly. After the scene has been processed, you'll be able to clean up and notify your insurance agent. Check

with police to determine how the perpetrator gained access to your house as well as steps that you can take to prevent another burglary.

Finally, I wanted to wish former Editor Rosemary Herbert the best as she leaves her post as Editor here at the Amesbury News. I'm happy to see she'll still be writing and look forward to her future stories. Rosemary added a new twist to "Watchwords" by turning some of the columns into a "Q&A" format, which worked quite well. She gave me many suggestions for stories as well. We shared many conversations and her dedication to promoting public safety was sincere. She also had a true passion for helping our community fight cancer and assured every story about the Relay For Life was highlighted and published promptly. Thanks Rosemary for your support and commitment to delivering *The News* to our community.