

VARSITY CIVIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE JUNE/JULY 2022 SPECIAL REPORT

Arson in Varsity

Recently two houses in Varsity were set on fire by an arsonist who has yet to be apprehended at the time of this writing (June 6, 2022).

The first fire occurred just after 3 a.m. on May 18 in the 1100 block of Varsity Estates Drive. CCTV footage showed a man setting fire to a back shed. Police believe the same person set a fire at 5 a.m. June 4 in the 1200 block of Varsity Estates Road. For more information and photos of the suspect, go to <https://newsroom.calgary.ca/suspected-arsonist-sought/>.

It is recommended that residents lock cars and remove garage door openers, keep outdoor lights on, and secure garages and sheds.

General Crime Prevention Information

Car prowlings and property theft comprise a frustrating and repetitive cycle for communities and the police. The vast majority of car prowlings and break and enters are "crimes of opportunity", committed by a small number of repeat offenders. The sequence usually starts with finding an unlocked car and progresses to accessing the garage via the garage door opener, to entering the house through an unlocked door or window; most commonly through the unlocked door from the garage. Unless something of obvious value is clearly visible (e.g., laptop on passenger seat), vehicles are seldom forcibly broken into because:

- a. It takes time and any noise created could attract attention.
- b. In the time required, it's faster, easier and probably more profitable to move on to other vehicles.

The thieves are looking for easily portable items of value, such as cash in a vehicle center console or tools in a garage. Car keys, which are usually in the back hallway in close proximity to the interior garage door, are another common target.

Criminals do scope out houses during the daytime and are very good at identifying those that are unoccupied. For example; an RV parked in the driveway during the week but absent on weekends. Daytime break and enters generally start by ringing the doorbell and either:

- a. Presenting a phony cover story (lost and needing directions, etc.) if someone answers and then quickly leaving.
- b. Attempting entry if there is no answer.

Criminals engaging in property theft do not want confrontation. The behaviour may be influenced by courts' dealing more severely if a theft includes personal harm to the victim but irrespective of the reason, a criminal's preferred action on realizing that the home is occupied during a home invasion is to flee.

The judicial system seldom holds/incarcerates anyone for car prowlings/property theft so the vast majority of criminal offences are dealt with by Field Officer Release. This is most easily compared to receiving a traffic ticket with a court date and then being released. For example, there is a well-known car prowler that has been at it for 15+ years. The CPS catches him all the time and he continues to be released by the courts either immediately or after very brief sentencing. This one person checks anywhere from 200-300 vehicles per night looking for unlocked doors. For him at least, the fines are not a deterrent but merely a cost of business.

Given the foregoing, collective action by homeowners can reduce an area's attractiveness to criminals by both eliminating the easy opportunities for theft and increasing the chances of getting caught. If residents in an area consistently follow the Calgary Police Service 9 pm checklist (below) such that night-after-night prowlers come up empty, eventually the criminals should lose interest in the area.

Steps that can be taken to increase a prowler's chances of getting caught include:

- a. Registering bicycles. The voluntary Bike Index program essentially operates as a registry for pedal bikes that law enforcement agencies use to locate owners when lost/stolen bikes are recovered. By making it more difficult to sell stolen bikes the registry may indirectly increase the chances of getting caught. A current limitation of the program is that people will register high-end bikes but don't generally do so for lower cost bicycles, such as children's bikes. Check out www.bikeindex.org.
- b. Bright exterior yard lights discourage criminals by increasing visibility around the home. Motion-activated lights provide additional short-term "startle" value and can also alert neighbours that something may be amiss. While it doesn't directly increase the chances of getting caught, the "surprise" from a motion-activated sprinkler system might be worth trying.
- c. Images from high resolution home security cameras would be useful to the CPS unit that uses facial recognition technology to track criminal activity. The video footage may not result in an arrest for the prowling in question but could assist in solving other crimes in an area. Contact the CPS via the non-emergency line (403 266-1234) or online at coplogic.ca.

9 pm Routine Checklist (CPS)

1. Remove valuables and garage door opener from vehicles.
2. Lock vehicles.
3. Close overhead garage door.
4. Lock door between garage and house.
5. Close and lock all external doors.
6. Ensure windows are shut.
7. Turn on an exterior light.