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## Increase in Residential Burglaries

By Laurie Snyder

"Burglar alarms? That's for when you go on vacation, or maybe at night! One o'clock in the afternoon? I came back an hour-and-a-half later. They'd come in through the doggie door. They'd ripped the sheetrock off the walls in the master bedroom closet, trying to pull the safe out of the wall," said 25-year Orinda resident Alison MacKenzie at the final Orinda City Council meeting of 2013. "They were able to peel the door back of the safe, and took every single possible piece of financial information, plus every Internet password to go with the laptop that they stole."

When the state of California released hundreds of inmates from prisons under the AB109 realignment, it hurt, explained Orinda police chief Scott Haggard. "We're feeling that effect across the state, and in Contra Costa County." Although grand thefts and commercial burglaries in Orinda decreased by 46 percent and 30 percent respectively, residential break-ins jumped by about 40 percent. "Those are the most egregious of the property crimes." In contrast, Moraga had a 56 percent increase in home burglaries while Lafayette's auto and commercial crimes "skyrocketed," said Haggard, who added that San Ramon reported a 200 percent increase just in auto thefts alone. MacKenzie's recent experience is a wake-up call for Lamorinda. "If I had known that, before my burglary, there were 84 residential burglaries during the daytime and that, when you leave your house even for an hour to go down to Safeway, you need to turn on your burglar alarm, I would have turned it on!" said MacKenzie, who suggested city council members consider installing license plate cameras at freeway entrances and exits.

"They rolled right down my driveway ... They kicked down the door," said Orindan Marc Rovetti.

"If you've traveled at all, the use of cameras [in Tokyo and London] is prolific. They use those cameras for solving all kinds of crimes," said Orinda's former mayor Tom McCormack. "So, I would suggest maybe looking at technology as a solution to the problem." Piedmont, he said, paid \$678,713 to install license cams. "It says to me that we, as a community, need to take steps," added Brad Barber.

Police are out in force, but they need help. Asked what citizens can do, Haggard continued to prod residents to be proactive. He's urging everyone to lock their vehicles, residential windows and doors, and set their home alarms - even if just stepping out for a few minutes. And he hopes everyone will band together. Right now, peering into the yard next door isn't being nosy, it's neighborly. So, keep your eyes open and call police right away if you do see something fishy.

### Tips from Chief Haggard for Preventing Residential Burglaries

- Get to know your neighbors. Join your neighborhood watch group. If there isn't one, start one.
- If you live in Orinda, schedule a home audit with the Orinda Police Department.
- Store heirloom jewelry and important financial paperwork off site - in your safe deposit box at the bank.
- Lock and alarm your car whenever you leave it - wherever it's parked.
- Lock and alarm the doors and windows of your home - even if only leaving for a short trip to the store. Invest in strong locks and kick-proof doors. Lock side and back gates to prevent easy access to the back of your home.
- Create an appearance of occupancy. Leave a radio on loud enough to be heard from the front door. Keep driveways clear of advertising and newspapers. Ask a neighbor to bring in your trash containers and check for UPS deliveries while you're away at work. For longer trips, have someone pick up mail daily, or ask those who deliver to hold items until you return.
- Use motion sensor-activated lighting dusk to dawn, and be sensible with porch lights. Leaving them on during the daytime may signal that you're away.
- Install front-of-house signage to let would-be burglars know they're on camera and are visiting a well-alarmed home.
- Get a dog.
- Call police if you see something "not quite right" at your home or a neighbor's - a delivery person without appropriate identification, a member of the cleaning staff arriving with another person when the employer is out of town, someone "mistakenly" ringing your doorbell, a van parked in an unusual spot or backed into a driveway while a family is away.

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