

CHAPTER 108
BURGLARY INVESTIGATION

DISCUSSION: In recent years, a steady increase of burglaries into various types of buildings and structures has become a source of serious concern in every community and a significant problem for the police. Most of these offenses occur on residential property, but burglaries into other public and private buildings have also increased. These crimes often occur under cover of darkness and usually without witnesses, the lack of witnesses make the detection and apprehension of offenders a difficult police task.

While there are obvious advantages for the night burglar, daytime burglaries have become more common and are on the increase. Daytime house burglars take advantage of the hours when residents are working, housewives are shopping and children are in school. During the hours of the middle of the day, they can pose as door-to-door salesman, gas and electric meter readers, tradesman, delivery men, etc.

House burglars generally fall into two (2) categories - the opportunist and the professional. The opportunist is the criminal who is always on the lookout for a place that is easy to break into with the least hazard of detection and where he can obtain cash, jewelry, television sets, radios, stereo equipment or other portable items that have immediate resale value. He may be armed or obtain firearms in the burglary and can be very dangerous if cornered. The professional, on the other hand, commits his burglary only after considerable planning. He usually has advance information on the valuable items he intends to seize, he knows the habits of the person living or employed in the building selected and he has adequate tools to make his entry effectively. Quite often he may commit his crime in a community far removed from his home and he provides himself with suitable transportation to carry his tools and to drive quickly away with the proceeds of his crime. In most cases, they are also acquainted with a receiver who can readily dispose of the stolen goods.

Many offenses of burglary in Hattiesburg are committed by juveniles who often commit senseless acts of vandalism. The damage and destruction of property is often far greater than the value of the property taken in the burglary committed by juveniles. This is particularly true in the burglary of school buildings.

The most important consideration in the prevention and control of burglary and related crimes is citizen cooperation. Without the involvement of citizens, no prevention program can be successful. All citizens of the community should be encouraged to take all necessary precautions to make their property more secure by utilizing adequate locks, burglary alarms, and sufficient lighting to deter criminals, and by marking property with names, numbers, or symbols which can be identified. A neighborhood watch program can greatly improve community security. Citizens should constantly be requested or encouraged to immediately notify the police when they observe suspicious persons or suspicious circumstances even if their suspicion later proves to be unfounded.

108.1.1 Response to Burglary in Progress

- A. An officer responding to a burglary-in-progress should not enter the building without adequate assistance, unless some person lawfully therein is in present danger of physical harm from the intruder. The same holds true in those situations where a

burglary alarm has been activated, a door has been found open or a person is observed under suspicious circumstances in what should be an empty building.

- B. Unless it is necessary to go to the assistance of a person in danger, officers should not enter any building where it is believed that a burglar is still therein until additional officers have arrived and all exits of the building have been covered.
- C. While waiting for assistance to arrive, an officer responding to a burglary-in-progress should take a position of advantage where as much of the building as possible can be observed and where the suspect is most likely to exit.

108.1.2 Response of Assistance

- A. Extreme caution should be taken to insure that plain clothes officer(s) arriving to the scene are properly identified as Police Officers and not mistaken for criminals.
- B. Arriving backup officers should take the most strategic position covering all possible exits. A check should be made for a lookout or an escape vehicle for the suspect if still in the vicinity. Officers should observe visible signs of entry at the doors, windows, or on the roof, keeping in mind the possibility that entry has been gained through the wall of an adjoining building.

108.1.3 Entry of the Building

- A. It is always preferable for the suspect to come out voluntarily and should be given that opportunity, if at all possible. This will avoid the possibility of injury to a Police Officer or other persons in the vicinity.
- B. If it becomes necessary to enter the building, the officers must work closely together, covering one another in the interior. This will avoid any danger of one officer injuring another accidentally. The telecommunicator should be notified prior to entering the building.
- C. Steps should be taken to avoid making a target by stepping in quickly and if a flashlight is necessary, it should not be carried in the gun hand.
- D. Officers should delay a few moments on entry to become accustomed to the darkness and then carefully and methodically check the building to see if a crime has been committed and if suspects are still there. Any place in the building can provide a hiding place and great care should be used in conducting the search. A trapped burglar can be a very dangerous adversary.
- E. If a suspect is located, he should be carefully handcuffed and searched immediately. Officers should not suspect that he is working alone but continue to search until the entire building and its immediate vicinity have been thoroughly searched. Notifications should be made IAW Department policy. The owner should be notified to secure the building.

108.1.4 Processing of the Scene

- A. After the completion of the building search and the apprehension of all suspects, a search should be conducted for physical evidence of the burglary. All physical evidence should be properly packaged and marked. The fact that a suspect was arrested while in the building and in the progress of committing the crime does not lessen the need or importance of collecting the evidence. In these situations the officer is still concerned with the need to:
 - 1. Collect evidence that will clearly associate the suspect with the intent to commit the crime. It is important for the officer to fully prepare his case on the arrested suspect.
 - 2. It is important for the officer to collect any tools or equipment used to commit the crime.
 - 3. Thorough processing of the scene for all available evidence may assist the officer in linking this suspect with other burglaries conducted in a similar manner.
- B. An officer responding to a burglary call, or an attempt, where the offender has escaped from the scene will obtain as complete as possible, description of the suspect, description of the vehicle used and direction of flight, if known. This information must be provided immediately to the telecommunicator for the attention of all other on duty officers.
- C. Safe guard the crime scene until a thorough search for fingerprints, tool marks or other physical evidence has been made and necessary photographs or measurements taken. Latent fingerprints from the crime scene that can be identified with a suspect are valuable for the successful prosecution of a burglary.
- D. The officer making the preliminary investigation should ascertain as accurately as possible the time the crime was committed, method of entry, description of any property taken including its value and identifying numbers or marks. The ability of the owner to adequately identify stolen property is essential for its recovery and a most important factor in leading to the arrest and conviction of the suspect found with stolen property in his possession.
- E. Officers should canvas the area for possible suspects, witnesses, physical evidence, etc.

108.1.5 Reporting

- A. This policy should be carried out in conjunction with all other relevant and consistent Departmental policies.
- B. Investigating Officer shall make full report IAW Departmental procedures.