

Distraction Burglaries/Gypsy Scams

Burglars are always finding new tricks and methods when it comes to burglarizing a home. One of the newest and trendiest is the “distraction” burglary. It’s a con game really. Distraction burglary is where a “visitor” comes to your home, tells you some lie to swindle their way into your home, or creates a ruse to distract the victim so an accomplice can slip in, which is the most common method. The most frequent target for these distraction burglaries are the elderly and vulnerable.

Police report that with spring here in bloom, more and more of these crimes will occur. A distraction burglary involves witty manipulation, and if you don’t know the signs, you may fall victim to this type of crime, even if you have [burglar alarm](#) in place. Here is some information and tips to help you be aware of someone attempting a distraction burglary.

Quick Fact: Did you know?

The average age of a victim of a distraction burglary is [81 years-old](#).

Here’s how it works:

The whole point of this operation is to distract you enough that it draws you out of your home, while an accomplice that’s unseen by the homeowner sneaks in the back door, or the front depending on the “con.”

For example, the distraction burglar will pose as a roofer, tree trimmer, city worker, or even as an employee of a utility company. Some have even gone as far as posing as someone in distress, such pregnant female having car trouble. Then the “utility worker” distracts the homeowner by walking them outside the residence to show them the “problem,” such as curb that needs painting or future work that needs to be done.

So while the owner is distracted by the “utility worker,” a second accomplice, which is never seen by the homeowner, enters the unlocked home and steals cash, jewelry, or any electronics he/she can get their hands on.

Popular schemes a distraction burglar will use to lure you out of your home:

1. Bogus Emergency

This scheme is used more often than others. A “utility worker” will arrive at your doorstep claiming there’s a gas leak or flood in your road and that he has to come in to turn off your supply. While you’re down in the basement, or wherever the burglar needs you to be, his partner swoops in while you’re distracted with the “emergency.”

2. The Sympathy Card

This tactic has the best chance in getting your distraction. This is more or less like the “I lost my dog” con. A burglar can knock on your door and tell you he desperately needs your help with whatever situation he/she is in. For example, “I’ve broken down, can I please use your phone?” or “I’ve run out of gas, could I borrow some money or a gas can?” Not only are you giving them a chance to burglarize your home, but they’re also getting a better look inside your home in the event they are unsuccessful in gaining entry into your home at that very moment.

So what can you do to protect yourself from the “distraction burglar?” 5 tips that will help you prevent the distraction burglary:

1. If you're not sure who the person is behind your door, don't open it! No one said you're obligated to open the door.
2. If the “con” is so convincing, call a neighbor or friend nearby to come along and check the perimeter of your home, or check on the visitor before opening your door.
3. If you are successfully lured outside of your home, make sure to lock the door behind you. Most importantly, make sure all entryways leading into your home are locked as well. This includes doors, windows, and the garage.
4. If you ever do find yourself in the position where you may have to help someone, refer them to a younger neighbor, or assist them through a window or closed door. You can also call a neighbor or friend nearby to come and help.
5. If you're unsure about the nature of one's visit, **DON'T OPEN THE DOOR!**

Remember, this is your home and you need to protect yourself from all the dangers out there. Don't be afraid to ask questions, and demand answers. Distraction burglars rely on you being trusting, nice and not the kind of person to offend someone. The distraction burglary can bring an overwhelming result. Victims can lose their peace of mind and confidence, not to mention valuables and possessions. Be wary every time you open the door, and most importantly, be safe!

Gypsy Scams

For local law enforcement purposes, the word "gypsy" refers to people who travel in small groups across the country perpetrating crimes of petty theft, larceny, burglary, and fraud. Over the past several summers, residents of local area communities have been victims of what have become known as "gypsy scams." Gypsy scams are incidents that occur in daylight hours, in which the suspect will, literally, walk right into someone's home for the purpose of stealing jewelry or money. Very often, the homeowner is either in or near the home. If these individuals are caught, they give some kind of excuse as to why they are in the home or on the property. So far, these individuals have not been violent and usually run from the residence as soon as they are discovered. The best way to keep these individuals from victimizing you is to simply keep your home locked, even when you are working in the yard. Remember, anytime you are outside your home, you cannot possibly see every door on your home that a would-be thief would use.

Popular Gypsy Con/Scam:

1. **Driveway Seal Coating Scams:** A typical seal coating scam often occurs in the following manner: the suspect approaches the homeowner with a claim of having "left-over" coating material (usually in the bed of a pick-up truck), and contracts to seal the homeowner's driveway. Once the homeowner pays for the job, the suspect sprays a cheap oily material on the driveway and leaves. Tips: Do not respond to door-to-door solicitors. If you need your driveway seal coated, you make the contact. Rely on friends and relatives for recommendations and referrals.

- 2. Contractor Fraud Contractor Fraud:** Beware of ‘contractors’ who come to your home or call you on the phone looking for work. Some will tell you they were just ‘passing by’ and noticed you needed a new roof, siding, or driveway (you fill in the blank). They may not be contractors, at all, not trained, not licensed, nor insured. These con artists will usually offer the work at a price far below what you’d expect to pay for it. And, more often than not, they will require you to pay in advance. The bottom line: you give them the money and never see them again. Professional, legitimate contractors never need to go door-to-door to get work, and they almost never require any money in advance before starting the work. If they do, find another contractor. Don’t sign any contract before reading it. Better yet, have your attorney look at it first. Call the contractor’s insurance company and make sure his / her policy is in effect. Check with the Secretary of State to make sure the contractor is licensed. Ask the contractor for references. If you need work done on your home and need to find a contractor, contact the larger home improvement stores for a list of companies that do work for them. Or, ask neighbors who have done work on their home.

As with any suspicious circumstance, call the Radnor Township Police Department immediately.