Rural Crime

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Rural Crime

Rural Crime Prevention Project
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in cooperation with
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"Crime" doesn’t happen just on TV police shows and in big cities. It’s happening in one-constable small towns, unoccupied farmsteads, maybe even at your own gas tank tonight.

Over the past several years, crime rates* have increased faster in rural areas and suburbs than in cities. This is particularly true of property crimes.

What about crime in rural South Dakota?

Rural South Dakota** still has a comparatively low crime rate—about half the national average. Nevertheless, the reported crime index in rural South Dakota increased 17% from 1972 to 1979. And we know that a lot of crime goes unreported.

Vandalism, theft, burglary, and assault, in that order, are the most common offenses in rural South Dakota, and these crimes occur more often in the country than in towns.

Dollar costs of crime

The dollar cost of crime represents a combined cost of property loss or damage, medical and psychological services, and work time lost as the direct result of a crime incident.

South Dakota’s losses to rural crime are not as large as to urban crime; however, rural crime adds up to a yearly estimated $4.4 million.

How we make it easy for criminals

Most rural South Dakotans surveyed believed that lighting, locking and identification are effective measures in preventing crime. But many of these same people admit they don’t practice these measures.

Unlocked doors and windows

• They make entry simple to even the least experienced criminal.
• Four out of 10 rural South Dakotans do not lock the doors or windows in their homes.

Unlocked gas/fuel tanks

• They are more appealing as fuel costs rise.
• Half of the gas/fuel tanks in South Dakota are not locked.

Unlocked outbuildings

• They are about as likely to be burglarized as the farm house.
• Outbuildings of 78% of country residents are not locked.

Inability to describe personal property

• It makes recovery and identification difficult.
• About 50-60% of rural South Dakotans mark either "none" or "very little" of their valuable household possessions. (Identification marks without records are of little value.)

Obvious signs of absence

• They give criminals an easy target.
• Very few (15%) rural residents leave lights on when away from home for an extended period of time (such as vacation). Only 48% leave lights on when away from home for a short period of time.

What can you do?

The “fortress mentality” which grips so much of urban America is not present in rural South Dakota and we wouldn’t want it. However, crime prevention can not simply be left to law enforcement officials.

Discourage crime

Rural residents can reduce the opportunities for crime. Lighting, locking, and identification are easy and effective methods.

Routinely lock all windows and doors. A criminal wants to avoid being caught, so the longer it takes to force a door or window the greater the risk for the
intruder. He also wants to avoid attracting attention by breaking glass or smashing doors (too noisy) or working in lighted areas (too conspicuous).

Outside post lights and entrance lights can illuminate possible hiding places around your home. When you are away at night, leave on some inner lights. Consider using an automatic timer that turns on and off any electrical device plugged into it when leaving for longer periods.

Crime becomes less attractive if you improve the chances of detection and apprehension. Mark your valuable property with your Permanent Identification Number.*** The window sticker warns criminals of the risk in entering your home.

Keep records of marked items and serial numbers, so police can trace items and you can file an insurance claim if necessary.

Be concerned

Rural South Dakotans take pride in being a friendly and congenial people. Neighbors who are also friends can prevent crime or get assistance for someone in trouble, because they know when things are “out of place” and because they care.

Anything unusual in your neighborhood should be immediately called to the attention of your law enforcement department.

Report any crime

Law enforcement officials alone can not fully serve the needs of a community because they can't be everywhere at once. Citizens need to help by reporting crimes.

Failure to report also leaves goods unrecovered and offenders free, perhaps to commit crimes against others.

No violation or suspicion is too small to be reported. Except for motor vehicle theft, the crime reporting rate in South Dakota is about 50% or lower. In the case of assault, the reporting rate is as low as 25%.

Know your police

Acquaint yourself with the services your local law enforcement department can provide. Many police and sheriff offices will make a nightly patrol of a home or farm when you are away for several days or more.

Become community minded

Be aware of community affairs and participate in local meetings and elections. Support public school efforts to provide students with a better understanding of government, the law, and a citizen's rights and duties. Support community youth groups, particularly those which build character and foster a sense of neighborhood.

One thing most of us like about South Dakota is the freedom from fear of violence to ourselves or our property. We can't afford to grow careless, however. With a little effort (lighting, locking, and identification) and a concern for our community we can keep crime from our doors.

***Contact your sheriff's office for your Permanent Identification Number and for assistance in how to use it.