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Myths and Urban Legends

Deputy Gary Gonsalves

Just like the hundreds of email solicitations that have been circulating over the internet for several years so too are videos claiming to defeat crime prevention measures. You have seen them. Someone uses their cell phone to remotely open the door to their vehicle or better yet, uses a tennis ball. There are dozens of these types of videos to say the least. Similar to the emails that have circulated regarding victimization of a gang initiation or assault, they all have one thing in common: to instill fear or concern.

Sometimes it's hard to differentiate what's true and what's not. Many of the emails and videos posted on the web could be classified as urban legends. Although some of the tales may have a bit of truth behind them, the vast majority do not. They circulate very quickly. Some are pranks and others are created to gain attention. Just recently we saw a text message describing how employees of a nationwide retail store would be the target of an assault. The press picked up the story and ran with it without verifying its validity. It was proven to be a hoax. The person who was behind it must have enjoyed their 15 minutes of fame.

To find the truth we must use the very tool by which we received the email or video; the internet. Many of these claims can be verified by visiting sites such as www.snopes.com. By entering a couple of keywords in the search bar there is a good chance that you will find your answers and be able to verify the claim. You can also do a general search using popular search engines like Google or Yahoo. The crime prevention unit uses these same methods and in some cases has actually tested the claims.

Mythbusters, which airs on the Discovery Channel, has even taken on some of these claims. Two of these myths can be viewed here:

Tennis Ball Key:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ1jfhaL3Ec&feature=Playlist&p=19D20447B779FFE9&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=10

Cell Phone Key:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oC_YdJeXouE .

Urban legends and email solicitations will always be out there. They will never go away. If you are concerned about what you read or see then take on the role of a detective and get to the bottom of the claim. When you find the truth remember to pass it on.

Open Garage Door Indicators

Deputy Glenn Hoffman

Most homeowners think of burglars breaking a window or forcing a door open to gain access to a home, but nearly half of all residential burglaries occur through an unlocked door or window. The quickest and simplest means for burglars to gain entry is an open garage door. In recent years, St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office has experienced numerous residential burglaries as the result of open doors or unsecured homes. An open door is

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an open invitation to crime. We have all done it – gone inside after working in the yard or retired to bed and left the garage door open. “Open garage door” indicators are available and can be affixed to your door immediately. A warning light will indicate “open door” when a garage door is open.

There are also automatic closers that will allow you to set a specific time to close the door automatically. It will work with most garage door openers and features a disable button that will allow you to keep the door open when you are in the garage working. Most automatic closers will also act as a temporary solution to garage doors opening on their own, which could happen due to a rogue signal that matches your access code or a short circuit in the electrical wiring that triggers the wall switch. These devices are available at most hardware or building supply stores that sell garage door supplies and openers. Prices range from \$20 to \$50.

Tips for securing your home and garage:

1. Secure all accessible entry points. Keep windows and doors locked when not at home or when you are in the basement, back part of the house, or in the yard. This will significantly reduce your chances of becoming a victim.
2. Create the illusion of occupancy. Research clearly indicates the single greatest deterrent is an occupied house. You should acknowledge anyone who knocks or rings the doorbell. Opening a door and acknowledging someone at the door are two different things. **DO NOT OPEN** the door to a stranger! Announce yourself through a closed/locked door and indicate, “This is not a good time for visitors.”
3. Physical security: Contact the St. Lucie County Sheriff’s Office Crime Prevention Unit at 871-5303 to schedule a residential security survey to identify your home’s vulnerable entry points and determine how to best address your physical security needs.