

Sense of safety strengthened through dogs at home and on the street



Pets can play a vital role in home security and be a visible presence of people 'out and about'. Dog walking, for example, is viewed as a positive marker of community safety with perceptions of safety and crime having a significant spill-over effect onto neighbourhood interactions and sense of community. If people are fearful they may be less likely to leave their home, use local facilities or attend activities, particularly at night.⁴⁴

In the 2006 National People and Pets survey, 88 per cent of dog owners agreed that having a dog around the home deterred burglars. Over a quarter of a million Australian homes were broken into at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey being undertaken, with a similar number being the target of an attempted break-in.

Leading insurance companies also agree that dogs can be an effective deterrent to burglars. Daniel Fogarty, head of personal insurance with a major insurance agency said that owning a dog was one of the measures that could help reduce the chance of theft.

"There are numerous precautions home-owners can take to minimise the chance of being burgled, from ensuring they have secure locks on all doors and windows through to installing alarms or owning a dog." Daniel Fogarty, Leading insurance company

Anecdotal evidence suggests that thieves are less likely to target homes where dogs are obviously on the premises. Research also shows that they heighten people's perceptions of safety and provide owners with important peace of mind.

One of the main benefits of having a dog on your property is its ability to alert neighbours if an intruder enters the property. A dog's bark is actually more of a deterrent than its size or ability to physically protect a site.

Residents on the Japanese island of Hokkaido have harnessed this dog safety capacity in an innovative way. They approached local police with the idea of combining their nightly dog walks with some neighbourhood watch. The "Wan Wan Patrol" (or "Woof Woof Patrol" in English) keeps an eye out for anything suspicious in the area. It seems to be working, with police reporting a 48% drop in crime since the citizen patrol began.

This type of thing can happen more informally.

As noted by one resident in qualitative Australian research, "It was originally Neighbourhood Watch, but now it is just an old man with a big dog that keeps a big note pad and runs around checking on everyone."

Another resident commented, you feel happier and safer when "there's a few people walking around, walking their dogs and stuff like that".⁴⁵

Benefits of pets as a natural burglar deterrent

- Research indicates that dog ownership can prevent burglary
- There is potential to increase safety in the community with police and citizen partnerships
- Owning and/or walking with a dog improves feelings of safety



Tips

- Encourage dog walkers to report suspicious occurrences to their local police station