

Clearing Your Home

Perhaps the worst possible self-defense situation any of us could encounter is to wake up in the middle of the night, hearing an invader in our home. While some might see that as an opportunity to prove their manliness, defending home and family, in reality it is a very dangerous situation. You're thrust in to an unknown tactical situation, against an unknown number of assailants, who could be anywhere in your home. Worse than that... there's the possibility that they've taken hostages.

I must say that this that this scenario is very fresh in my mind this morning, as it was awakened by my wife at 2:00am, because she heard someone in the house. I grabbed my gun and flashlight and started working my way through the house, clearing it room by room. Fortunately for me, our break-in artist was nothing more than a stray cat that managed to find a way into our house somehow.

Nevertheless, that stray cat reminded me of the challenges that go along with building clearing, especially building clearing by yourself. Contrary to what we see in the movies, police basically don't even attempt to clear a building alone. There are just too many places to hide in most buildings, which would give the bad guys a chance to outflank the police and kill them.

But that's just what we're facing, when we look at clearing our homes from a potential middle of the night invader. They've got almost all the advantages; so we need to do what we can, to maximize the few advantages that are ours.

Learn Your Home

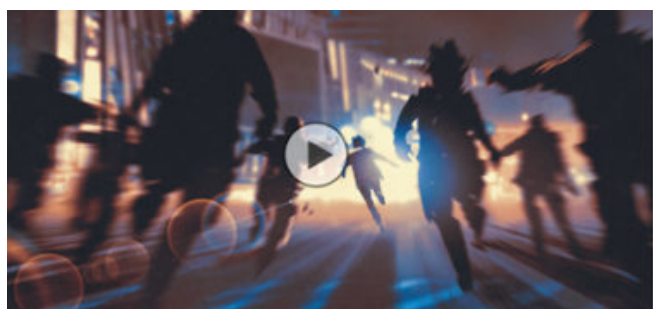
The one big advantage that we have in such a situation, is that we're fighting on our home turf. In practical terms, that

means we know the ground we're fighting on, better than any invader can. We can, and should, further that advantage, by learning our homes so well that we can walk through them blindfolded, without running into anything.

Yes, I'm serious about that. Blind people learn how to navigate around their homes, by knowing just how many steps it is from one obstacle to the next. Therefore, they can navigate around those obstacles, without any aid whatsoever; and they do it, without running into anything. If they can do that, we can too.

Part of this is knowing how your home looks in the dark. Where are the shadows and what are the shadows of? What's that thing in the corner, which looks like it could be a person? You need to know what things look like, so you'll recognize when something looks out of place.

The benefit in all this is that we will be better able to maneuver in the dark, without giving away our position. While any invader is going to be stumbling around in the dark, at least to some extent, giving away their position, our knowledge will allow us to move quietly, as well as provide us with the information needed to pick out hiding places they might be using or that we might use ourselves.



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Keeping From Getting Shot

The most important part of clearing your home is keeping the invaders from shooting you. You're not going to be very

effective at protecting your family, if you manage to get yourself shot or stabbed. This is why police always clear buildings with teams. Nobody can look in all directions at the same time; so while the lead guy is looking forwards, others are looking to the sides, above, and behind. That's an advantage you won't have.

More than anything, keeping from getting shot means keeping the bad guys from seeing you. if you take your time and do things properly, you can at least minimize their chances. There are a few key things to help you accomplish this.

The big problem is anything that can be considered a choke point; someplace you have to go through, where they can see you. Doorways are the classic example, although corners, staircases, and hallways qualify too.

Use Mirrors and Shadows

One thing that can help is using mirrors to see around corners. Those could be mirrors that you have mounted to the walls, allowing you to see inside rooms, or it could be a portable mirror, with a handle, which you can stick around the corner, allowing you to see if anyone is there. The view won't be perfect, so don't put all your faith in it and just waltz around the corner after looking.

Using a hand-held or pole mounted mirror has it's risks too. Just as it allows you to see around the corner, it can telegraph your position to anyone there. Even if they can't see your reflection in the mirror, they might be able to see the mirror itself. A mirror appearing and then disappearing indicates that there's someone there. You can reduce your exposure by holding the mirror close to the floor; but you can't eliminate it altogether.

Slicing the Pie

The big clearing tactic that everyone uses is called “slicing the pie.” The idea here is to minimize your exposure, by moving around the corner or through the doorway in increments, allowing yourself to see another “slice” of the room; inspecting and clearing it.

Let’s say you’re coming up to a corner or doorway. You stop short of the corner, where you can see just a little bit of the opposite wall. Inspect that, making sure that nobody and nothing is there, including shadows. If it is clear, you take a small step forward and to the side, allowing you to see a bit further, exposing another slice. Stop and take a moment to inspect that slice as well. Continue in this manner, little by little, exposing more and more of the room for you to see.

While the focus is on exposing a bit more with each step, you’re also exposing yourself to whoever might be around that corner bit by bit. That makes you a poor target, as it is difficult to hit a sliver of a person. Most people won’t think of shooting through the corner, unless they are trained soldiers.

Stay Back from the Corner

Whenever you’re approaching a corner or opening, you want to stay back from it, at least until you’ve visually cleared the space behind it. There’s always the possibility that a bad guy is hiding just around that corner. If you walk right up to the corner, sticking your gun’s muzzle beyond it, before your body gets there (like you see in the movies), you make it extremely easy for them to grab your gun’s barrel and disarm you.

That problem doesn’t exist if you’re three or four feet away from the wall, as you clear that corner. First, you’ll see them before they see you, because of slicing the pie. But then, you’ll also be out of reach. Should they decide to lunge

for your gun, all they'll do is make themselves into a good target. Just pull the trigger.

Using a Flashlight

As much as possible, you want to avoid using any sort of light, whether that is a room light, a handheld flashlight or a light mounted to your gun. While I highly recommend both having a tactical flashlight and a gun-mounted light, they should only be used when absolutely necessary. Using a light doesn't just provide you with information, it tells your adversaries where you are; and it will do that much further away than it will tell you where they are.

If you have to use a light, then just flash it on and off, leaving it on no more than a second. As soon as you turn it off, move quickly a step or two to one side. That way, if they've seen your light and choose to shoot at it, hopefully you'll already be out of the way.

Flashing the light will allow your eyes and brain to take a "snapshot" of whatever is in front of you. First, pick out anything that might look like a bad guy, even if that's only part of their body. Then use the information to plan your next move, whether that is to move to a vantage point that gives you another angle to look from or it is to move through the room, clearing it.

Plan Your Clearing Route

With the knowledge that you have, once you've truly learned your home, you can plan the route that you're going to take, while clearing it. Actually, you should plan more than one route, based on different times of the day or night, with you starting from different places in the home.

The most likely scenario is a break-in at night, while you are in bed. With that being the case, your first move is to arm

yourself and clear the room that you're in. I don't bother to put on a robe, as that might impede my movement, and I'm not concerned about how they see me. Once armed, clear the room you're in first, including the closet and behind any furniture.

From there you want to move to any rooms where other family members are sleeping, all while keeping yourself between them and the rest of the house. This might be difficult in some homes, where the master bedroom is on one side of the living spaces, while the kids' bedrooms are on the other side. If that's the case, then you have to clear the living spaces, before you can go to the kids' rooms. Never cross an area without clearing it, as that just makes you a target.

What About Your Spouse?

If you and your spouse are both shooters, it gives you a huge advantage. You might still have to take the lead, doing the majority of the clearing; but your spouse can help as well. They can either serve as the eyes in the back of your head, protecting you from being outflanked or they can stay with the kids, protecting them. My plan is to have my wife follow me, acting as my rear guard, until we get to the rooms where our kids or grandkids are sleeping. Once we've cleared that, she'll stay there, protecting them, while I move on to clear the rest of the house.

Of course, that only works if your spouse is a shooter. Don't even think of putting a gun in the hand of someone who is not ready and trained in a situation like this. Sheer adrenalin and fear could cause them to pull the trigger at the wrong time, hitting you, instead of a bad guy.

Plan B

There is a plan B to consider and even a plan C. Plan B is calling the police and telling them you suspect an intruder in

your home. Unless they're extremely busy at that moment, they'll send someone right over. Of course, that means you'll have to get out of bed, put on a robe and clear enough of the house to get to the door; but you won't have to clear the whole house by yourself.

Plans C is to just stay in the bedroom and allow the thieves to get whatever they want. Whatever they steal isn't worth as much as your life. Granted, none of us want to have our home ransacked and things stolen from us; but there is real risk in confronting any criminal. If most of your valuables are in the master bedroom, and you're already there, what are they going to get?

