

**Building a new home?**



**Neighbourhood Watch**  
Let's watch out for each other

**Ask your builder about**

# **Protecting your building site until handover**



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**A guide for property owners and their builders**



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## Preventing building site theft and vandalism

Millions of dollars are lost on home building sites each week through theft and vandalism.

Theft from residential construction sites accounts for around 1% of the cost of a new home – hidden costs that are often passed on to the home buyer.

Thieves are both opportunistic and resourceful and anything on a building site is vulnerable – raw building materials, tools, fittings and fixtures, whitegoods and hot water systems.

This guide aims to help property owners work with their builders to lower the risk and the incidence of building site thefts and vandalism, promote site safety, and reduce the associated costs of site theft to the industry and the community.

### Items most often stolen from building sites

- timber
- copper piping
- slate roofing tiles
- electrical cable and wiring
- windows and doors
- bathroom fittings
- kitchen appliances and fittings
- hot water systems
- air conditioning units
- trade tools
- spas
- doors
- whitegoods

## Before building starts

### Have a builder and homeowner chat

Before homeowners and building contractors sign an agreement, it's good to get together and chat about the measures that are in place to reduce thefts and vandalism during the construction stage, make the site as safe and secure as possible and legally remove and dispose of building rubbish.

### Meet the new neighbours

At all stages of the building process, neighbours can play an important part by reporting suspicious behaviour.

Get to know immediate neighbours as soon as possible, including nearby businesses. Introduce yourself and exchange contact details. Ask them to report any suspicious activities or unusual noises on your building site, like the removal of items such as white goods, copper piping and doors, especially outside construction hours.

## Providing a safe workplace

It's the builder's responsibility to provide a safe workplace. WorkCover authorities may impose heavy penalties for those who do not practice due care or where injury or death results from unsafe or negligent work practices.

## Domestic building insurance

Builders in Victoria are required by law to take out domestic building insurance, also known as builder's warranty insurance, for work valued at more than \$16,000. This provides cover to homeowners for incomplete and defective building work. Find out more information at [www.dbi.vmia.vic.gov.au](http://www.dbi.vmia.vic.gov.au)



Let your new neighbours know the date you plan to move in.



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## Foundation stage

### Fencing and signage

Temporary fencing around the building site acts as a barricade and can help reduce theft and vandalism. Some Local Government areas have by-laws making suitable fencing mandatory.

Ask your builder to prominently display information such as their contact details (including after-hours details) on the site to help police respond quickly if there is an incident.

### On-site security

Your builder should install security cameras and audible alarms at key locations on site via a temporary power connection. The best systems are those that have off-site monitoring and safe storage. They may also hire a security service to monitor the site, do patrols after hours or provide guards.

If there is security surveillance on site, make sure your builder places signs prominently around the site's perimeter, including entry points, gates and exits.

### Power and lighting

Intruders love the dark and construction sites can provide the perfect environment; they are often poorly lit with plenty of hiding places. The last thing intruders want is a well-lit site where they can be easily seen, so providing good lighting is essential. A well-lit block can provide neighbours with line of sight to your place.

Ask your builder to consider placing some form of temporary lighting at the site to illuminate the front and footpath areas. This is particularly important if street lighting hasn't yet been activated in the area.

If storage facilities are located in dark corners, make sure they're well-lit with security lights or motion sensor lighting.



**Ask your builder what on-site security measures they plan to use to protect the site during construction.**

### Coordinate deliveries

Most thefts occur when items such as windows and timber are left out unattended for long periods of time.

Ask your builder to coordinate deliveries of building materials and goods to coincide with the days that tradies will use or install them.

Your builder should also check deliveries when they're received and report any damage or shortfalls to the delivery driver, site manager and/or supplier straight away.

An inventory management system will help your builder to keep accurate, up-to-date records in case items are lost or stolen and you need to make an insurance claim.

### Tradies

Ask your builder to encourage tradies to keep their vehicles, trailers and tool storage locked when on site and to not leave tools visible in their vehicle or lying around. A strong, tough toolbox secured with large, heavy-duty, visible locks and bolted to the vehicle's tray is best.

Urge tradies to engrave their tools and equipment with the letter "V", followed by their Victorian driver's licence number, use data dots, and/or consider listing their tools on Property Vault – [www.propertyvault.com.au](http://www.propertyvault.com.au). These measures provide easy identification if items are stolen and recovered, and makes it difficult for thieves to on-sell them.



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## Frame stage

### Site safety

Ensure footpaths and walkways are free of dirt, rubbish and building materials. Items left on the footpath from the site are a hazard and can leave the builder/owner subject to expensive legal action should an injury or damage occur.

### Keep other valuables under lock and key

Other valuables, such as copper piping or slate roofing tiles, also fetch a lot of money and are often the first things that thieves target. So, it pays for your builder to ensure that valuable materials like these are kept out of sight, either in a lockable container or secure building.



Check whether your builder uses microdot technology or spray paint to mark building materials with the company name or site number to make them less attractive to thieves.

### On-site storage

Ask your builder whether it will be necessary to have an on-site storage container or compound, secured with a heavy-duty padlock, shackle protector and chain, to safeguard tools, equipment and building supplies out of public view. It's important to avoid leaving building materials unsecured when nobody's around.



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## Lock-up stage

### Window and door locks

At lock-up stage, the home becomes more vulnerable to theft. Ensure that all doors and windows have heavy duty, keyed locks fitted and make sure they are all locked securely when the site is unattended.

### Appliance delivery

Insist that your builder has expensive appliances delivered and installed on the same day. Don't leave empty packaging lying around the site, as it gives potential thieves a visible cue.

### Control access

Your builder should limit who can have key access to the site and should make sure that all master keys are always accounted for.

### Alarms

If fitted to the house, have the security alarm or surveillance system switched on and working as soon as possible.

## Fit-out stage

### Appliances

Delay the fit-out of major appliances and whitegoods until the last possible opportunity. Some builders now do fit-outs with the new owner present, who then takes possession of the house.

### High-risk items

Your builder should make sure movable items such as spas, air-conditioners, solar panels and compact hot water services, are difficult to steal. Ask your builder to secure them with special bonding adhesives, tamper-proof metal fasteners and/or anti-theft fixtures where possible. They can also remove key components to render the items temporarily useless and display notices stating this.



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## Handover stage

### Arrange a fast handover

You builder should hand over the keys to you as quickly as possible after work is completed. A fully finished house with no occupants is a target for an opportunistic thief.

### Check contract items

The builder and homeowner should check over the contract when the home is completed. You should ask for, and receive, serial and model numbers for appliances that have been fitted.

### Review security

Please review security measures in the home as soon as possible after taking possession. This might include changing lock barrels, fitting sensor lighting, alarms and smart cameras, installing security doors, adding rolling shutters, security screens and/or one-way blinds to windows and upgrading window and door locks.

### Protecting valuables

One of the first things you should do is make an inventory of all valuables in the home, for easy referral later if necessary. Include details such as make, model and serial numbers and add a photo if possible.

Use an ultraviolet pen or engraver to mark all valuables with a "V" followed by your Victorian driver's licence number.



Generally, you can take out home and contents insurance once you have received a certificate of occupancy.



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## Suspicious behaviour

One of the best and easiest ways to prevent theft or vandalism at your building site is to be alert for suspicious behaviour. Ask neighbours, including business owners, to keep an eye out for suspicious behaviour and report it to police straight away.

### What is suspicious behaviour?

Behaviour is suspicious, not people. It's when someone is doing something that seems unusual and out of place from what's normal. It can include:

- People loitering around the site and checking it out when workers and tradies have left.
- People removing building materials or other goods from the site outside construction times.
- Vehicles regularly and continuously driving around the area, particularly at night. Be alert to vehicles that have obscured or missing number plates.
- People climbing over fences or testing gates and locks.
- Equipment noise such as angle grinders coming from the site outside of construction hours.

### Reporting suspicious behaviour

If the suspicious behaviour is happening now, call Triple Zero (000) immediately.

If the suspicious behaviour has passed and doesn't need police attention straight away, or you need to report any thefts or vandalism, call the Police Assistance Line on 131 444 or report it online at [www.police.vic.gov.au/PALOLR](http://www.police.vic.gov.au/PALOLR)

Recording some of these details may help police:

- Time and date
- Location
- What happened
- Description of person such as height, build, gender, clothing, and any features such as a beard or tattoos
- Description of vehicle, especially distinguishing features such as damage, stickers, modifications, colour and rego number
- Only take photos or video if you can do it safely

If the suspicious behaviour is happening now, call Triple Zero (000) immediately and ask for police.



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## Illegal dumping

Illegal dumping is the disposal of waste on public or private land or into water without a licence, permit or approval from council, the EPA or other relevant authorities.

Most construction waste is managed responsibly. However, illegal dumping of building and demolition materials costs Victoria more than \$30 million a year in clean-up costs (EPA, 2017). It also negatively affects the environment and the liveability of an area, and often attracts more dumped rubbish.

Some property developers will fine the homeowner for rubbish their builder leaves behind.



Ask your builder how they plan to legally remove, dispose of or even recycle building rubbish.

## What can builders do?

Builders can:

- Discourage dumping by keeping a clean site with waste sorted and contained. Casual dumpers often see loose waste as an invitation to discard their waste as well.
- Install signage and surveillance to discourage dumpers.
- Before starting construction, plan how they will correctly and legally remove, recycle or dispose of all building rubbish.



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## What can homeowners do?

If you are not building on your land immediately, consider putting up fencing to deter people from accessing your property.

Ask your builder to install a temporary security camera throughout construction. See if they will leave it in place between handover and your move-in date to help deter building materials from being dumped or whitegoods stolen from inside.

When sourcing a builder, ask what policies and procedures they have in place about removing and disposing of building rubbish.

## Reporting dumped rubbish

Report any dumped rubbish immediately to your property developer, to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and/or your local council. Don't hesitate to report multiple times to multiple agencies. The quicker that rubbish is removed the better.

If you see someone dumping rubbish, call Triple Zero (000) straight away while they're doing it. If it's happening now, Victoria Police want to know and act. If it is happening regularly and you report it, they may be able to conduct more patrols of your area.



Report illegal dumping to the EPA at [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au) or by calling 1300 372 842. You can also report it to your local council.



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