



# TRAINING BULLETIN

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## BURGLARY TOOLS

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this Bulletin is to provide guidance to officers on identifying tools commonly used to commit burglaries. Recognizing these tools during patrol operations, traffic stops, investigations, and crime scenes can aid officers with their investigations. Proper identification and documentation of burglary tools can strengthen cases, support prosecution, and enhance overall crime prevention.

### INTRODUCTION

The California Penal Code (PC) establishes that possession of certain tools or instruments along with specific criminal intent may be a misdemeanor. Penal Code Section 466(a) contains the definition for *Burglarious and Larcenous Instruments*:

*A person who possesses a picklock, crow, keybit, crowbar, screwdriver, vise grip pliers, water-pump pliers, slidehammer, slim jim, tension bar, lock pick gun, tubular lock pick, bump key, floor-safe door puller, master key, ceramic or porcelain spark plug chips or pieces, key programming device or key duplicating device, signal extender, or other instrument or tool with the intent to feloniously break or enter into any building, railroad car, aircraft, or vessel, trailer coach, or vehicle as defined in the Vehicle Code, or who knowingly makes or alters, or attempts to make or alter, a key or other instrument named above so that it will fit or open the lock of a building, railroad car, aircraft, vessel, trailer coach, or vehicle as defined in the Vehicle Code, without being requested to do so by a person having the right to open the same, or who makes, alters, or repairs any instrument or thing, knowing or having reason to believe that it is intended to be used in the commission of a misdemeanor or felony, is guilty of a misdemeanor. Any of the structures mentioned in Section 459 shall be deemed to be a building within the meaning of this section.*

**Note:** California PC Section 459 defines the criminal statute for *Burglary*.

Some of the items specified by the section are common tools that are often possessed and used for legitimate purposes. What makes the possession of these items unlawful is when they are possessed with the criminal intent to break into or enter a building, vehicle, vessel, aircraft or rail car.

## PROCEDURES

This list of specified items outlines commonly encountered burglary tools and indicators of their use. Officers should be aware that many burglary tools are everyday items that may have legitimate uses. Therefore, the totality of circumstances including location, time of day, behavior, and other articulable facts must be considered when determining criminal intent. Some of these items include, but are not limited to:

- Picklocks
- Keybits
- Crow/Crowbar
- Screwdriver
- Vise Grip Pliers
- Water-Pump Pliers
- Slide Hammer
- Slim Jim
- Tension Bar
- Lock Pick Gun
- Tubular Lock Pick
- Bump Keys
- Floor-Safe Door Puller
- Master Key
- Ceramic/Porcelain Spark Plug Chip

### Key Programming Devices and Signal Extenders

On January 1, 2026, PC Section 466 was amended to include a *key programming device*, *key duplicating device*, and/or *signal extender* to the list of burglary tools.

The widespread deployment of anti-theft equipment installed by vehicle manufacturers, including transponder keys, have made vehicles much more difficult to steal when a key is not present. Recent investigations have revealed that emerging electronic technology, such as key programming devices, are being used to steal vehicles. These devices can override a vehicle's ignition system or can be used to reproduce key fobs.

**Key Programming Devices:** A "key programming device" or "key duplicating device" refers to any device with the capability to access a vehicle's onboard computer to allow additional keys to be made, delete keys, or remotely start the vehicle without the use of any key. A key duplicating device also includes any device with the ability to capture a key code or signal in order to remotely access a vehicle.

These devices vary by manufacturer in appearance and often resemble an electronic tablet or cell phone. The functionality also varies, however, the device must have key programming or key duplicating functions to qualify as a burglary tool.

Key programming devices may contain device based and cloud-based data that may include the vehicle information as well as the registered purchaser. This can be provided by the manufacturer upon service of a search warrant.

Key programming devices may contain a basic history of key fob and immobilizer data which could be stored on the device and can be viewed by simply turning it on and searching the history section. This data may include a historical record of Vehicle Identification Numbers (VIN), as well as dates, time, and vehicle descriptions.

Obtaining data from these devices may provide information pertaining to the users of the device as well as the vehicles connected to the device.

Additionally, any search of these devices must be conducted in accordance with California Electronic Communications Privacy Act. The California Electronic Communications Privacy Act (CalECPA), specifically Penal Code § 1546 et seq., requires law enforcement to obtain a warrant, subpoena, or specific consent to access an individual's electronic device data, stored communications, or location information.



Autel KM100



X Tool- Auto Propad



Display of Various Key Programming Tools

### Important Considerations for Key Programming Investigations

- During the investigation, was a key fob or multiple key fobs discovered along with the programmer? Inspect the key blade within any key fobs to see if it is actually cut or blank. A legitimate key will have a cut or milled blade.
- Was any additional evidence present (e.g., other key programming devices, other burglary tools, other key fobs, etc.)? Cold plates (license plates belonging to another vehicle) and counterfeit temporary plates are often used by suspects to disguise stolen vehicles.
- Conduct a thorough interview of the suspect after proper Miranda advisement to obtain a statement to demonstrate the suspect possessed the items with the specific intent required.

**Signal Extender:** A “signal extender” refers to a key fob amplifier or other device that extends the signal range of a keyless entry car fob to send a coded signal to a receiver in a vehicle to lock, unlock, access a vehicle, start the engine, or interact with other remote commands associated to the vehicle’s onboard computer. These devices are also referred to as “relay attack modules” and may vary in appearance, however the method of operation is similar by amplifying or “relaying” a key fob radio frequency signal. These devices do not retain vehicle data.



Signal Extenders

### **Investigative Advice**

As possession of burglary tools is a misdemeanor crime, advisement for booking or other investigative actions is the responsibility of the Area auto and/or burglary coordinator. If additional off-hours support is needed, Department personnel can contact the Taskforce for Regional Auto Theft Prevention (TRAP) or Commercial Crimes Division (CCD) through the Department Operations Center (DOC).

### **CONCLUSION**






While an arrest for possession of burglary tools requires the suspect to possess the tools with specific criminal intent to break into or enter a building, vehicle, vessel, aircraft or rail car, this intent is often not directly admitted. Intent can often be established through circumstantial evidence, including the suspect's suspicious behavior, the timing of the possession, prior related convictions, additional physical evidence, or incriminating statements. Knowledge of these tools can help further the Department's Mission by safeguarding the property of the people we serve.



Field Training Services Unit  
Police Training and Education Group

DISTRIBUTION "A"

Attachment: Burglary Tools Reference Guide

**Burglary Tools Reference Guide:  
Possible Burglarious and Larcenous Instruments**

<i>Tool/Implement</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example Photograph/Picture</i>
Picklocks (Lockpicks)	Tools used to pick and bypass locks.	
Keybits	A small bit or instrument used to turn a lock.	
Crow/Crowbar	A metal bar used for prying open doors or windows.	
Screwdriver	A common tool, often used to pry open sliding doors or unstable locks or turn a vehicle ignition cylinder.	
Vise Grip Pliers	Locking pliers used to turn lock cylinders or pull locking mechanisms.	
Water-Pump Pliers	Slip joint or "Channel Lock" type pliers used to turn lock cylinders or pull locking mechanisms.	
Slide Hammer	A tool used to pull locks out of doors or remove the cylinder from a vehicle ignition column.	
Slim Jim	A thin strip of metal used to open car door locks.	

<p>Tension Bar</p>	<p>A tool used in combination with lock picks to apply torque.</p>	
<p>Lock Pick Gun</p>	<p>A device used to pick locks rapidly.</p>	
<p>Tubular Lock Pick</p>	<p>A tool designed for tubular, or “round,” locks.</p>	
<p>Bump Keys</p>	<p>Specially cut keys used to open pin tumbler locks.</p>	
<p>Floor-Safe Door Puller</p>	<p>A tool designed to pull the door off a floor safe.</p>	
<p>Master Key</p>	<p>A key designed or altered to open multiple locks. Includes “shaved keys” which are filed down keys used primarily to defeat car ignitions/door locks when used to “jiggle” the lock open.</p>	
<p>Ceramic/Porcelain Spark Plug Chips</p>	<p>Broken portions of a spark plug insulator used to break vehicle windows quietly.</p>	