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Home Burglary Prevention Tips

Protecting Your Home While You're on Vacation

Double- and triple-check all doors and windows before you leave. Make sure your house is as locked-up and secure as it can be in your absence. (Don't forget the door leading to the garage!) Be sure to leave some curtains and blinds open to give the illusion that someone is around. Thieves tend to take note of a house that's clearly been closed up.

Talk to a trusted neighbor about helping create a "lived-in" look. Have them use your outdoor trash cans and collect your mail, newspapers, and any delivered packages. Stacked up mail and newspapers along with empty trash cans can be a clear sign to anyone that you're not home and may be gone a while. If you're taking a winter getaway, ask your neighbor to create tire tracks in your driveway and leave footprints leading up to your front door to create the illusion that someone is home. If you're taking an extended summer vacation, pay someone to cut your grass and keep the yard tidy.

Don't forget to give your spare key directly to your neighbor rather than leaving it under the mat or in a faux rock or statue. It's important to leave a key in case of emergencies, but it's also helpful to have someone check in on your home periodically to ensure no one has entered in your absence. Make sure you leave a contact number where you can be reached while you're away. And always return the favor to a neighbor in need!

Put timers on lights. Select a few rooms in your house to remain lit to reduce the chances that any thief casing the neighborhood will notice that you've been gone. Have outdoor lights, especially around entrances, set to light up every evening. A bright house welcomes friendly guests, but a dark house welcomes undesirable visitors.

Lock your garage door and disconnect the automatic opener. This is an easy, but often forgotten step to keep your home safe while away. Garage doors seem like impenetrable forces so it's easy to overlook additional steps in securing them. But if you're going to be gone for a week and won't need the automatic lift anyway, why not disconnect it and add an easy extra layer of security?

Leave a radio on and turn down your doorbell. A battery-operated radio is a practical, cheap way to make it sound like someone is around. And since many burglars ring the doorbell or knock to

see if anyone's home turning down the sound of the doorbell combined with a loud radio will make thieves unsure if the house is empty or if the resident simply doesn't hear the door.

Don't advertise your trip. It's pretty common for people to post all about their upcoming trip on social media, but avoid the urge. The more people who know your house will be empty, the more you open yourself up to the possibility of a break-in. Similarly, don't leave a message on your landline answering machine that you're out of town.

Consider buying a home security system. There are countless features with any security system, and some particularly valuable ones are outdoor motion detectors, sensors at exterior doors, windows, and the door attached to the garage, an outdoor alarm to alert other neighbors to an intrusion, and security cameras. Select the features that best fit your needs and be sure to go with a well-known, reputable company. Once it's installed, make it a regular habit to use it. Though it may seem inconvenient to have to arm the system every time you leave the house, many burglars are aware that the responsibility is often neglected and may not be deterred by window stickers or yard signs warning of home protection. Keep shrubbery around entrances and walkways trimmed. The last thing you want is to make it easier for a thief to hide when attempting to break in, so eliminate his options for hiding spots. He may only need a few minutes of cover to make his entry but with no place to hide while doing it, he's less likely to even try. You could even plant thorny shrubs by your windows to make it not only difficult to break in, but painful!

Have someone pick up your mail, newspapers, and fliers. Piles of these items indicate to criminals that you have been away from home. Have a neighbor, friend, or family member pick up these items while you are on vacation to make it seem as if you are home. Alternatively, contact the post office and have them hold your mail for you while you are gone. If you will be gone for an extended period, like a month, then schedule someone to mow your lawn while you are gone as well.

