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How To Keep Your Home Safe While You're Away

Leaving for vacation? Make sure you'll return to find your home as you left it by following these simple steps.





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A well-lit home helps deter unwanted entry.

Somewhere between school graduations, kids underfoot and your own need to find a quiet place, you realize it's time to begin the annual preparation for the great family summer vacation.

Before hitting the road for that much-anticipated break, homeowners need to make certain their home remains safe and secure while they are relaxing on the beach, hiking that woodland trail or checking out those new city museums and urban landscapes.

"Before you leave on vacation, review and upgrade the security lighting in your home, outdoor timers, and landscape lighting," says Mike Scott, vice president of merchandising for Lowe's in Mooresville, N.C. "With dusk to dawn lighting, neighbors are able to see someone trying to break into your home. A well lit exterior is a big deterrent to thieves."

Another huge deterrent to crime visiting your doorstep is knowledge. Call your local police agency and ask to speak to the crime prevention specialist. Then, put those guidelines to work for you and your family.

Hire Help:

- Decide whether employing a house sitter works in your particular situation. When a home remains occupied there is no need to stop the mail, find pet care, etc., as life's traffic continues to flow to your door.
- Planning on extending your vacation 30 days or more? Make provisions to have someone live in your home. A number of homeowners' policies have exclusions for [properties](#) not inhabited for 30 days or more. Check your homeowner's policy before leaving your home for an extended vacation.
- Box up valuable jewelry and drop in a safe deposit box at the bank. No safe deposit box? Leave valuables with mom and dad or trusted friend.
- Stash computer passwords in a locked desk drawer.
- Password-protect your computer against snooping eyes.
- Protect yourself against identity theft. Lock up identity-rich items such as tax returns, [credit card](#) statements, and utility bills.

Enlist Friends or Neighbors:

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- Ask a neighbor to handle the trash containers and recycle bins.
- FedEx and UPS deliveries pile up. A neighbor can fetch and hold the packages until you return from your trip.
- Don't forget to make provisions for the daily mail. Neighbors or friends can help by coming by the house daily to collect the mail.
- Alert trusted neighbors that you'll be away and ask them to keep a watchful eye on your home. Give them a phone number of a relative or friend they can contact in case of an emergency.

Exterior:

- Make arrangements to have your lawn mowed while you're gone. One of the best theft deterrents is to give the impression you are home.
- Halt mail and newspaper deliveries.
- Buy motion sensor lights and install them in the front and backyard to ward off unwelcome visitors. Exterior lights should illuminate all entry points. Avoid creating shadows or glare and be sure that every entrance to your home is lit with at least one type of security light.
- Don't advertise your absence on your answering machine.
- Ditch announcing your travel destination and length of stay on any social media.
- Itching to share those vacation photographs on the Internet? Don't announce your house is vacant. Wait until you're home again to post vacation snaps.
- Plan on leaving one of your cars in the driveway or on the street? Do not leave the [garage door opener](#) in the car. A thief can easily break into the car, open the garage door and gain entrance to your home.
- Get rid of overgrown bushes and trees in front of windows and doors. Intruders scour the neighborhood for homes that provide cover for their deeds.
- On exterior doors, replace all existing door strike plates with a heavy gauge strike plate [like this one](#). Make sure the strike plate has screws three to four inches long and are at an angle to make it more difficult to kick in the door.

Interior:

- Monitor your home from anywhere with a remote monitoring system like the [Schlage Link system](#). Advanced technology lets you monitor and control door locks, lights and the Schlage camera from any internet-enabled computer or cell phone.
- Set interior lights on a timer.
- Install a sump alarm and water leak detection system like the [FloodTek](#). Floods and leaking pipes happen whether you're home or away.
- Hate the sound of barking dogs? So do thieves. Purchase a [dog-barking device](#) linked to motion detectors.
- Put your TV on a timer to give the appearance the house is occupied.
- To protect against storms, thefts and accidents, insure that valuable art collection before you leave on vacation using an art insurance company

like [AXA Art](#).

- If dogs, cats, birds, and hamsters are part of the family, you can't leave them home unattended. Locate a reputable pet sitter in your area or boarding kennel for Rover, Miss Kitty, Mr. Tweet and Harry the hamster.
- Protect your important possessions from theft and natural disasters. Get one of the newest in-house security safes on the market like the First Alert safe..
- Don't play into an intruder's hand by leaving items that a thief could use to break into your home such as a ladder, a chair, rope, an industrial metal drum or other similar items.
- Unplug all unnecessary appliances to prevent potential fire hazards. Don't overlook the toaster and coffee makers, as small appliances count, too.
- Install a wooden dowel to prevent a sliding glass door from being opened from the outside.

Last Minute Reminders:

- Most burglars enter homes through open doors and windows. Make sure ALL [doors and windows](#) are securely locked.
- To keep you safe while in your vacation home, take along a security system like the [GE Personal Security system](#). The package includes the window or door alarms, doorstop alarm and keychain alarm. No wiring needed, simple to install.
- Before you pull out of the driveway, retrieve that spare key you've hidden underneath the big rock by the front door (or wherever you put it!).

Text by Judith A. Stock
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