



## **10 tips to vacation proof your home from crime**

**Here are some important guidelines to help ensure your house is safe while you're not around:**

### **Find a neighbor to trust.**

Neighbors can pick up papers, cut grass and walk around the house to check that everything is OK. Sit down at the computer and draw up a checklist in Word that includes contact information, where you're going and for how long. Cancel mail and newspaper delivery for the duration of your absence.

### **Secure doors and windows**

Experienced burglars can tell from the street if a door is easily breachable. Install deadbolt locks and make sure the strike plate is securely fastened to the door. You could have this great lock, but if somebody gives the door a kick, the whole thing could go down. To make sure the door frame is secure to the house, use two-and-a-half- to three-and-a-half-inch wood crews. Door glass can be covered with a film or glazing that is resistant to breaking. This can be installed by professionals at a reasonable cost.

Make sure all basement and ground-level windows are secure. Simple strategies to securing doors and windows are available at most larger hardware stores.

### **Advertise your alarm system**

A home alarm system can also be a serious deterrent and can earn you a

reduction on your insurance policy. A blaring alarm is bound to get some attention, if not alert the authorities. If you have an alarm, do you have the stickers visible on the front door?" Signs like this tend to put off burglars.

If you're looking for a quick fix, some sources recommend heading to the hardware store for alarms you can install yourself. You can find both entry alarms, which sound when a window or door is opened, and motion-sensor alarms that sound if movement is detected inside. The products range from \$20 - \$50, and while they don't have all the bells and whistles of a home alarm system they may be a cost-effective alternative.

### **Make a few cutbacks**

Crop shrubs and if necessary, trim trees. If your yard is neat there is nowhere for a burglar to stand or hide when breaking a window.

### **Install appropriate lighting**

Install electric timers and make sure outdoor motion sensors stay on once activated. You want exterior lighting that stays on during crucial times for both front and back doors.

### **Unplug**

You turned off your appliances and maybe unplugged them too, but what about your internet and computer? In today's electronic age criminals may not need to get into your house in order to glean personal information that can be used to steal your identity.

The way in: Your internet connection and computer. The way to stop it: disconnect. Unplug any LAN cables (the cable that connects your modem to your computer) and unplug your wireless router or modem if necessary.

### **Play hide and (don't) seek**

Can you see expensive electronics and equipment through the window? If so, experts warn you're practically inviting criminals into your home. It's best to keep these things out of sight to keep them out of mind as well.

If a burglar does get into your house, they're looking for your jewelry, important financial documents, electronics and other valuables. However, they can't steal what they can't find. Consider removing these items from your home altogether if possible -- to a safety deposit box or a trusted friend's home, for instance -- or invest in a fire-proof safe.

If you have to leave items at home, hide them somewhere other than the bedroom and office (where criminals tend to look first).

### **Go for the lived-in look**

Make it look like someone is still living in your home, even if you don't have a house sitter.

We've all heard the trick about putting lights on timers, but you can take this tactic even further by doing the same thing with your stereo and TV too. Unlike the movie, you don't have to rig up elaborate contraptions -- just generate some noise and light to keep people guessing. Have lights come on at different times in different places in your home, and let a talk radio station provide some conversation.

Another thing many people overlook: their blinds and drapes. Leave them in their normal (or close to normal) positions and resist the urge to shut your house up completely during the time you're away.

One exception to the noise rule: Turn down the ringer on your phone so outsiders won't hear that it's not being answered.

### **Be anonymous**

Because so much information is readily available, experts also recommend that we keep some key details to ourselves. One of the biggest no-nos is displaying your name on your mailbox or on a decoration in your yard. This personal touch can lead resourceful criminals right to you.

Another technology issue: the answering machine. Regardless of whether you're home or not, the safest message is a generic one that simply says you can't come to the phone. Don't give your name on the message, and never say you're away from home or when you'll be returning.

### **Keep your plans to yourself**

Naturally, you want to share your travels with your friends and family, and with social networking sites, blogging and Twitter it's easy to keep everyone up-to-date (and riddled with envy).

However, you don't always know who's watching and any information you reveal can be paired with other data that's easily accessible online (like your address). Counting down the days until your vacation, posting about your activities while you're away and sharing photos may seem like harmless activities, but they could put you at risk.

And it isn't just the online world you have to worry about. Avoid discussing your plans in public places or at the office where anyone can overhear.

The bottom line: Only tell people you trust that you're going away. You may be excited about your trip, but it's safer to tell people about it after you've returned.

### **Have someone move your car around.**

Anything that looks the same day after day reveals you're not around. Leave your car in the garage or have someone move it around for you. Give your house a lived-in look.

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