

Home Security When You're Away

While it's difficult to protect your home from professional thieves, most home burglaries are done by amateurs. These thieves are more easily thwarted if you employ some of these simple security precautions:

- Plan to "burglarize" yourself. You'll discover any weaknesses in your security system that may have previously escaped your notice.
- Lock up your home, even if you go out only for a short time. Many burglars just walk in through an unlocked door or window.
- Change all the locks and tumblers when you move into a new house.
- For the most effective alarm system, conceal all wiring. A professional burglar looks for places where he or she can disconnect the security system.
- Your house should appear occupied at all times. Use timers to switch lights and radios on and off when you're not at home.
- If you have a faulty alarm that frequently goes off, get it fixed immediately and tell your neighbors that it's been repaired. Many people ignore an alarm that goes off periodically.
- A spring-latch lock is easy prey for burglars who are "loiding" experts. Loiding is the method of slipping a plastic credit card against the latch tongue to depress it and unlock the door. A deadbolt defies any such attack. It is only vulnerable when there is enough space between the door and its frame to allow an intruder to use power tools or a hacksaw.
- If you lose your keys, change the locks immediately.
- Before turning your house key over to a professional house cleaner for several hours, make sure the person is honest and reputable as well as hardworking. Check all references thoroughly. If the house cleaner is from a firm, call your local Better Business Bureau to check on the firm's reputation.
- Instead of keeping a spare key in a mailbox, under the doormat, or on a nail behind the garage, wrap the key in foil -- or put it in a 35mm film can -- and bury it where you can easily find it if you need it.
- Don't leave notes for service people or family members on the door. These act as a welcome mat for a burglar.
- If the entrances to your home are dark, consider installing lighting with an infrared detector. Most thieves don't want to be observed trying to get in a door.

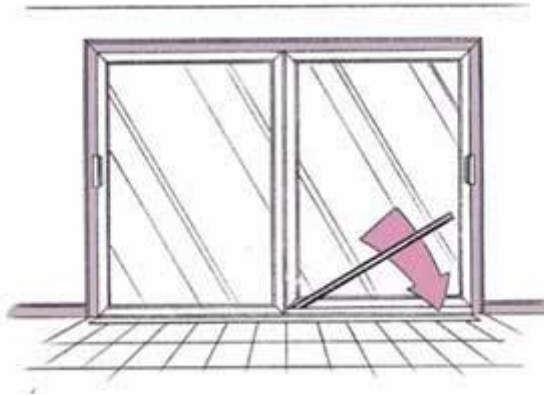
- Talk to your neighbors about any suspicious people or strange cars you notice lurking about.
- To keep your tools from being stolen, paint the handles. Thieves avoid items that are easy to identify.
- Trees located near windows or shrubbery that might shield a burglar from view can be major flaws in your home-protection plan. Consider your landscaping plan in light of your protection needs.
- Ask for credentials from any sales-person who requests entry to your home. Ask that their ID be pushed under the door. Many professional burglars use this cover to check out homes. If you're doubtful, check with the person's office before letting him or her in.
- Do not list your full name on your mailbox or your entry in the telephone book. Use only your initial and your last name.
- If someone comes to your door asking to use the phone to call a mechanic or the police, keep the door locked and make the call yourself.
- Dogs are good deterrents to burglars. Even a small, noisy dog can be effective -- burglars do not like to have attention drawn to their presence. Be aware, however, that trained guard dogs do not make good pets. Obedience training and attack training are entirely different, and only the former is appropriate for a house pet.



Securing Doors

- To help burglar-proof your home, install 1-inch throw deadbolt locks on all exterior doors.
- A door with too much space between the door and the frame is an invitation for the burglar to use a jimmy. Reinforce the door with a panel of 3/4-inch plywood or a piece of sheet metal.

- If there are door hinges on the outside of your house, take down the door and reset the hinges inside. Otherwise all a thief has to do to gain entry to your home is knock out the hinge pin.
- You can burglar-proof your glass patio doors by setting a pipe or metal bar in the middle bottom track of the door slide. The pipe should be the same length as the track.



- It's easy for a burglar to pry through rot. Replace rotted door frames with new, solid wood.
- It's simple for a thief to break glass panels and then reach in and open a doorknob from the inside. A door with glass panels should be either fortified, replaced, or secured with deadbolts that can only be opened with a key.

Securing Windows

- Protect your windows with one or more good locks, an alarm system, burglar-resistant glass, or many small panes instead of one large area of glass.
- When installing a window lock, drip some solder on the screw heads. It will stop a burglar from unscrewing the lock after cutting a small hole in the windowpane.

Garage Security

Garages present special challenges for security. Here are some tips for keeping your garage secure.

If you frost or cover your garage windows, burglars won't be able to tell if your car is gone.

Keep your garage door closed and locked even when your car is not in the garage.

Install a peephole in the door separating the house from the garage. If you hear suspicious sounds, you can check without opening the door.

Are you worried about someone entering your house through your attached garage? If the garage door lifts on a track, a C-clamp can provide extra security since the door cannot be opened if you tighten the C-clamp on the track next to the roller.

Burglars always look for signs that a house is uninhabited -- and the longer the house is empty, the more vulnerable it becomes. Follow these tips for keeping your house secure while you're away:

- If your plans to be away from home have been publicized through a funeral, wedding, or similar newspaper notice, hire a house sitter. Burglars often read the newspapers to see who's planning to be away from home all day or for several days.
- Ask your neighbors to use your garbage cans when you're on vacation so your absence won't be so evident.
- If you're going to be away from home for several days -- or even for just one day -- adjust your telephone ring to its lowest volume. An unanswered phone is a quick tip that your home is empty.
- We've covered home security -- when you're there or when you're away. Now you can rest easier no matter where you are.

Protecting Your Valuables

The most obvious way to protect your valuables is to store them in a safe-deposit box or in a secure home safe that is too heavy to be moved. When buying a wall safe, be sure it's fireproof. If you don't want to invest in a safe, other less-expensive alternatives can limit theft potential:

A chiseled-out space in the top of a door makes a great "safe" for small valuables.

Devise a hiding place in an acoustical ceiling. Remove a tile and restore it afterward with magnetic fasteners or a similar device. Be careful not to leave finger marks.



Devise a hiding place for valuables in an acoustical ceiling.

Hollow out the leg of a table or chair for hiding small objects. Drill from the bottom, then cap all the legs with rubber tips.

Avoid obvious places such as mattresses, drawers, inside figurines, behind pictures, and under carpets.

Many police departments offer a program that includes home inspection, advice on protective measures, and use of an engraving tool to mark a code number that will identify your valuables in case of theft. Call your police department to find out if they offer such a service.