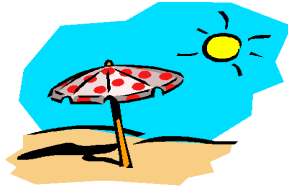


Keeping Your Home Safe While you are on Vacation!



A residence left empty while its owners are traveling is a tempting target for criminals. Police don't want to scare you, but it's imperative that every traveler take certain key steps to keep his or her home safe as possible while they are away. Basic preventative measures can reduce your chances of being a victim of a crime.

1. Ask a Friend or Neighbor to Help

A simple way to gain peace of mind while traveling is to ask a friend or neighbor to keep an eye on your house while you're away. Ask him or her to check on your home once every day or so and check on the place. Give this person a key so that he or she can bring your mail in or newspapers, water your plants, etc. If you don't use a garage, you may ask your neighbor to park in front of your residence or in your driveway every couple of days. He or she should also have your contact information and a copy of your itinerary in case of emergencies.



2. Don't Tip Off Criminals on the Web

In a world where it seems everyone is talking about their business on social networking sites like Facebook, Snapshots, Twitter, etc, it's important to stop and think: Who exactly is reading this information? Would you announce to a crowd that you will be leaving your house unattended for two weeks? If not, then you should think twice about posting your detailed vacation plans on Twitter or Facebook -- especially if that information is visible to Internet users other than your friends and family (and it probably is).



3. Arrange to have grass mowed (or snow plowed) while gone if needed.



4. Curtains Closed -- or Open?

Before you leave for vacation, you may decide to close your curtains to prevent people from peering inside your home to see whether you're there. However, closed curtains also stop those who aim to help -- the police, your neighbors or friends -- from seeing inside your house. So what's your best bet? Leave your curtains exactly as you usually keep them when you're home, since noticeable changes could hint that you're not around. Move expensive items, like jewelry or computers, out of plain sight if they're visible from the window.



5. The Lights Are on But No One's Home

Don't leave your lights on at home throughout your entire vacation in an effort to make it look like someone is in the house. House lights blazing throughout the night might look a bit odd.

Instead, purchase a light switch timer that can turn your lights on and off automatically according to a programmed schedule. Criminals keeping an eye on your house will notice lights flipping on and off, and will probably assume someone is doing the flipping.



6. Stop Your Mail and Newspapers

Either place a "stop" order on mail and newspapers (or arrange to have a friend or neighbor pick up your mail while you're away).

Otherwise, a week's worth of papers piled on your front step could signal to criminals that this particular homeowner is out of town. It's easy to put your mail on hold at USPS.com. Free newspaper may still be delivered so have a plan.



7. Lock doors and windows

Make sure all locks are in working order – use them. Activate alarm if you have one.



8. Pull the Plug

Unplug your television, computer, toaster oven and other appliances to protect them from power surges. Do this to save power as well. According to the Consumer Energy Center, many appliances use power even when they're turned off.



9. Remove Your Spare Key

That plastic rock isn't fooling anyone. If a criminal figures out you're away on vacation, it's likely that he or she will check your porch for a spare key. So reach under the mat, into the mailbox, above the door frame or into the flower pot and remove your spare key before you leave on your vacation.





Vacation Safety Tips

Vacation is a time to relax and have fun. Preparing for a trip requires a lot of planning. Planning can decrease the chances of becoming a victim of a crime. Tourists make tempting targets for thieves, often lost or distracted, weighed down with bags, carrying camera, money and other valuables. It is best for you and your family to do all you can to blend in with the crowd. Here are some suggestions for keeping you and your family safe when planning your next trip.

1. Before you go, make sure to clean out your wallet or purse, take only essential credit cards.
2. Carry your purse close to your body, or wallet in an inside front pocket. Consider wearing a money pouch under your clothes.
3. Pack as lightly as possible. Lots of heavy, cumbersome bags will slow you down and make you more vulnerable.
4. Expensive, designer luggage can draw unwanted attention to your belongings. Pack your things in inconspicuous bags.
5. Carry on anything you may need or of value (i.e. medication, jewelry, etc.)
6. Don't display expensive jewelry, cameras, bags and other valuable items.
7. Travel in well lighted and populated areas if possible.
8. Be aware of your surrounds, know where you are.
9. Always carry a charged cell phone with you.

Remember to report suspicious activity to Police immediately! Call 301-279-8000 for a suspicious situation and 9-1-1 if a crime is in progress.