

Home Safe Home

Millions of household burglaries take place in the United States every year. Home security is no joke, but if you follow these home safety tips, maybe you can have the last laugh.

Sound the alarms

You can install either a central or local electronic home alarm system. Central systems are maintained by a monitoring company that notifies the police when alarms are set off. You, on the other hand, monitor local systems. Before you buy, check with friends and neighbors who have security systems to find out which ones they think are reliable. And ask your homeowner policy carrier if you'll get a discount for adding safety features to your property.

Closed door policies

Doors can be important crime deterrents. If you have chain locks, get rid of them. They provide a false sense of safety. On the other hand, deadbolts, which are locks that work with a knob or key, are much sturdier, more reliable and less likely to fall prey to a strong shoulder.

Sliding glass patio doors can be security weak spot. Lay a bar—or piece of wood—in the bottom track of your patio doors to keep them from being opened from the outside. Install vertical bolts to keep the doors from being lifted from their track...then opened.

Remember to *always* lock the door to an attached garage. Don't rely on your automatic garage door opener for security. And lock all doors connecting the garage to your home, too.

Vacation smarts

When you are going to be away for an extended period of time, buy and set timers on lights, radios and TVs that turn on and off intermittently to create the illusion that you're home. And keep your curtains open to help your house maintain its everyday, lived-in appearance.

Have your neighbors or other family members pick up your mail while you're gone. Or go to the post office and fill out a card to temporarily stop your mail delivery. You can also stop your newspaper delivery by calling the customer service department. The point is not to leave a "pile" of clues indicating that you're away.

From the outside in

Landscaping can inadvertently create criminal nooks and crannies. Be sure to trim your bushes and trees at all entrances, walkways and windows—and keep the area outside your windows free of overgrown plants so you'll have a clear line of sight to spot any intruders.

Install security lights around the perimeter of your property and a low-voltage light outside every door so the exterior of your home will be well lit at night. Then you'll be able to scan your property from the inside—*safely*.

A big part of protecting yourself from burglary is keeping your home from looking like an open-house invitation. A well-devised security plan may cost you money up front, but it may save your valuables and, most importantly, give you peace of mind.

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