

Tips for Keeping Your Home Safe While You're On Vacation

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While most of us relish the summer months because it's time spent on vacation and camping trips with family and friends, burglars also delight in June, July, and August - homeowners are away, some leaving their homes as easy targets.

Most communities across the United States will experience a 10 to 18 percent in home burglaries during the months of June, July, and August, with most tending to occur in August, according to FBI statistics.

"A significant number of break-ins could be prevented with simple precautions such as canceling a newspaper delivery, placing timers on lamps, and having a neighbor take in the mail," said Lauren Russ, executive director of the Burglary Prevention Council, a nationwide nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public on crime prevention.

Some 28 percent of burglaries are made without force, meaning through an open door or window, which underscores the importance of locking your doors and windows, even if you're only away for five minutes.

Of the 1.2 million burglaries that occur each year, many are avoidable. In fact, nine out of 10 home break-ins could have been prevented if homeowners knew how to burglarproof their homes, according to the Insurance Information Institute.

Securing your home - whether you're home or away for just a few minutes - could save you hundreds or thousands of dollars; the average loss per residential burglary hovers around the \$1,300 mark.

Light, time, and noise are a homeowner's greatest weapons in the fight to prevent a home burglary, according to the III.

The BPC and III offer these specific tips to follow before you go on vacation:

- Examine your house from the street and make sure no valuables, like expensive electronics or artwork, are visible from the street. If a passerby can see your belongings, so can criminals.
- Lock and fasten all doors and windows. Doors should have deadbolt locks.
- Secure sliding glass doors. Place a metal rod or piece of plywood in the track to prevent an intruder from forcing the door open.
- Always lock the door to your attached garage.
- Make it appear that you're home - use timers on lights, radios, and televisions.
- Keep the perimeter of your home well light.
- Never leave clues that you are away. Ask a neighbor to collect your mail and newspapers - or ask for them to be held. You may also want to ask a neighbor to park in your driveway so it appears someone is home.
- Keep some shades and blinds up and curtains open to keep a normal appearance.
- Never leave a message on your answering machine saying you are on vacation.
- Trim the shrubbery near your home's entrance and walkway. This prevents a would-be burglar from hiding in tall, bushy foliage.
- Organize or join a community watch program to protect your neighborhood.

And, of course, if you have a home security system, make sure it is activated when you leave. The more difficult you make it for the intruder, the less likely he or she will be to pursue forcing their way into your home.

In fact, the III says that if it takes a burglar more than four or five minutes to break into your home, they'll move on to the next one.

In addition, most insurance companies provide 2 to 15 percent discounts for devices that make a home safer - dead-bolt locks, window grates, bars and smoke/fire/burglar alarms.