

SECTION 4: SAFETY AT HOME**SAFETY AT HOME**

Many real estate professionals have home offices. Whether you work at home or not, you might want to consider additional steps to secure your home. Burglars usually leave if they can't break in within ninety seconds. Anything that slows down a thief by even a minute or two can keep your house from being robbed.

The Home Safety Council has a wealth of information on making your home safer. Visit their Web site at www.mysafefhome.org and get a personalized checklist to meet your personal home safety needs.

In the meantime, here are a few tips:

- Make sure that all doors to the outside are metal or solid, 1 ¾" hardwood and have good, sturdy locks.
- Use the locks you have. Keep your doors and windows locked, even if you're at home. Get your children into this habit, too. And always lock up your home when you go out, even if it's only for a few minutes.
- Secure sliding glass doors with commercially available bars or locks, or put a wooden dowel or broomstick in the door track.
- Make sure your windows, especially at ground level, have good locks and use them.
- Make sure all porches and other possible entrances are well lit. Heat- or motion-sensing lights are a good choice for outdoor lights.
- Trim any bushes or trees that hide doors or windows. Keep ladders, tools, toys, and recreational equipment inside when you're not using them.
- Don't hand out keys to friends, even if they are trustworthy. Know the location of all your house keys all the time. Never use hide-a-keys or leave the key under the doormat, above the door, in a flowerpot, or anywhere outside the house. You may think you're being clever, but experienced thieves know all the tricks. Also, keep your car keys and house keys on a different ring if you ever use valet parking or leave your keys with parking lot attendants or even at a repair garage.

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- Watch your trash: Just bought a new entertainment system? A bunch of empty boxes out by the curb triggers an alarm to would-be thieves. Instead of putting boxes out in plain sight, cut them down, and stuff them in trash bags.
- Keep written records of all furniture, jewelry and electronic products. If possible, keep these records in a safe deposit box, fireproof safe, or other secure place. Take pictures or a video, and keep purchase information and serial numbers if available. These help law enforcement agencies track recovered items.
- Clearly display your house number, so police and other emergency vehicles can find your home quickly.
- If you see a screen that has been cut, broken windows, or a door that's been left open, don't go in. Call the police from a neighbor's house or a public phone.
- If you hear a noise that sounds like someone breaking in or moving around, quietly call the police and wait calmly until they arrive. If you can leave safely, do so. Otherwise, lock yourself in a room you are in, pretend to be asleep.

FOR APARTMENT DWELLERS

- Have the apartment's locks changed when you move in. (The maintenance crew can simply swap lock cylinders with a random vacant apartment, a project that is free and takes only a few minutes.)
- Depending on the neighborhood, you may also feel more secure if you have a deadbolt lock. Apartment renters, make sure to get permission first.
- Use your peephole, and don't open the door for strangers. Demand identification from package delivery services, even if they're in uniform. (Uniforms can be stolen.)
- Even if you're home, don't leave the door to your apartment unlocked.
- Make sure the building's public areas aren't threatening, i.e. lights out in the parking lots, laundry room, or hallways.
- Get to know your neighbors, and watch for suspicious people on the premises.

(Sources: Nevada County Association of REALTORS®; City of Baton Rouge, LA; Home Safety Council; Kwikset)

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- Home security alarms are available for apartment and condo dwellers as well; look into portable door/window alarms or a wireless home security system (things that can move with you when it's time to find a new home).
- Just use your last name, or if necessary last name and first initial, on your door or mailbox. This keeps strangers from knowing your gender or how many people live in your apartment.

WHEN YOU GO AWAY

- Ask a trusted neighbor to collect your mail and newspaper, and offer to return the favor.
- Leave word about when you're leaving, when you'll return, and how you can be reached in an emergency.
- Put automatic timers on at least two lights (and possibly a radio) to help your home look and sound lived-in.

(Sources: City of Baton Rouge, LA; www.homesecurityinformation.com)