



Keep your home SAFE while on **VACATION**



Don't Broadcast

Keep your house looking as if you're home. Keep a car in your driveway or parking spot. If you're driving, ask neighbors to park in front of your house.

Don't shut all your blinds and drapes. Leave them in their usual position, but make sure nothing valuable can be seen through the windows.

Set light timers to come on at the normal after-work time. For a new twist, there's FakeTV, a small electronic device that simulates real television lighting. (faketv.com).

Don't let mail and newspapers pile up outside your door. Rely on the kindness of friends, or arrange to have your mail held by filling out an online form at holdmail.usps.com/holdmail.

Don't change your answering machine message when you are gone. Tell only those who need to know, and those friends and family you trust, that you're going away. Instruct your kids to do the same.

Thieves prowl airport parking lots (especially long-term lots) for cars and valuables to steal. Anything with your name and address on it could be pay dirt for a thief. Clean out anything with even a hint of personal information, including mail, publications and store receipts. Don't leave your GPS device, either, unless you want to leave a set of directions for the criminal to get back to your house.

Taking a car service or taxi to the airport means the driver will already know your address and that you will be away. Don't provide any more information than absolutely necessary.

While there are no hard statistics (yet), insurance companies warn there is anecdotal evidence suggesting social media sites have become a popular hunting ground for would-be burglars. Be careful what you post and tweet. If you can't refrain from sharing while vacationing, be careful who sees your posts by checking social media privacy settings.

Think twice before you check in on a social network. Foursquare and review sites can put your whereabouts into a cyberspace anyone can view. Be sure your check-ins are shared only with a select group of friends.

Lockdown Details

Good deadbolt locks are the hardest for burglars to breach. Go through each room before departure and be sure everything is locked. Two home entrances most commonly overlooked when going away are the door leading from the attached garage into your house and any pet door you've installed.

Unplug the power to your automatic garage door to keep thieves from opening it with a universal remote.

If you have an alarm system, remember to engage it when you leave, and inform the alarm company in advance of the dates you will be away. If no one is expected to be in your house during that period and your alarm goes off, in most cases the company will respond by automatically sending the police.

High-Tech Help

You can have your whole home in the palm of your hand, through the magic of apps. Ring Video Doorbell (ring.com) and SkyBell Wi-Fi Video Doorbell (skybell.com) both use a camera equipped with night vision, plus a monitor and speaker to show you, via a smartphone app, who's at the door. Both can be installed on your door, connecting into the existing doorbell. The doorbell's ringing triggers an alert to an app on your smartphone. You will be able to ask "who's there?" and whoever is there will hear you through the bell's speaker; a burglar will think you're home, and move on. Both systems can detect someone stalking around the front of the house without actually pushing the bell.

Alarm.com (free) hooks up with your existing home security system to alert you in real-time if there's any movement or security breach in the system. It enables you to access the home security video stream or change security settings remotely.

iSentry (free) turns the webcam on your home computer into a surveillance system — although it will only monitor the area in which the cam is pointed. When motion is detected, the app notifies you on your phone. Similar: AtHome Camera and iCam stream video from home cameras to multiple iPhone or Android devices.