

How to Protect Your Home While on Vacation

Burglars Go Shopping While You're On Vacation

Picture this: you and your family are returning from a fun-filled vacation, ready to unpack and update the photo album. Only when you get home, you find the front door open, the back window broken, and valuables missing from all over the house, including your "clever" hiding places in the dresser drawer and in the back of the freezer. You're not alone. Each year, nearly 5 million families become victims of household burglary, often while they've been away on vacation.

Your Home Sends Signals

According to the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA), there are some simple steps you can take to make your home less attractive to would-be burglars. The best way is to combine the list of ideas below with a professionally installed and monitored electronic security alarm system in your home. Before you leave on your trip, pack your sunblock and be sure to:

- Get a trusted friend or relative to "house sit." Or, make sure your neighbors know your plans.
- Have a neighbor pick up your newspapers and your mail for you daily.
- Lock all doors and windows, and secure the garage door.
- Leave a car parked in the driveway, or ask a neighbor to park in your driveway.
- Leave a house key -- and a number where you can be reached -- with a trusted friend or neighbor.
- Use timers to turn lights on and off at certain times, altering lighting patterns, to create an occupied look.
- Leave drapes and shades open as normal. (Closed blinds during the day are a sure sign of an empty house, plus they allow a burglar to attend to his business unseen by neighbors.)
- Arrange to have your lawn mowed.
- Be sure your trees and hedges have been trimmed. This gives burglars fewer places to hide.
- Replace any burned-out lights in your yard. Consider upgrading outdoor light fixtures with devices that have built-in motion detectors, which turn on the lights whenever anyone walks past.

Electronic Security

An electronic security system adds a barrier of protection to your home that is unparalleled. The NBFAA recommends that consumers purchase systems from its members. NBFAA members are exposed to training, certification and information that sets them apart from the rest. The association recommends calling at least three companies before selecting an installer. Prices will vary, based on the level of protection and type of technology used, so be

sure to compare apples-to-apples bids on similar systems. Don't forget to factor in monthly monitoring charges.