

Living Alone—A Security Plan

Home security seems to be a never-ending problem. Living alone can make that problem appear greater than it is. Here are some guidelines to improve your security situation.

A Stranger at Your Door

Before answering the door, pretend you have company by yelling loudly something like “It’s alright, Joe, I’ll get it.” If the front door doesn’t have a peephole, have one installed—and use it. Also use a door chain when cracking open the door to strangers. Feel free to close and lock the door again while the stranger waits outside if you have to get something or answer the phone. Ask to see an unexpected stranger’s ID before unchaining the door, even one wearing a uniform. If the stranger gives you a phone number to call instead of showing an ID card, look up his company’s listed number. Call it to check his ID while he waits outside. If you’re still in doubt, call the police.



SECURING YOUR HOME

- When moving into a new home, change all outside door locks.
- All doors leading to the outside or to a garage should be at least one-quarter-inch solid wood or metal in firm frames. They should also have deadbolt locks with a 1-inch bolt.
- Walk around the outside of your house and see if you can find a way to get in without using a door. Then correct such problems.
- Never leave a key in an accessible hiding place. Instead, give a duplicate key to a neighbor, friend or relative. Mark your keys with your zip code and carry them in a pocket, not a handbag.
- Install metal grills or bars over any windows or glass doors accessible from the street. Be sure at least one set of bars in every room can open from the inside, in case other exits are blocked by fire. Drop a broomstick or metal pipe in the bottom track of sliding glass doors to keep them from sliding. If you can't install grills or bars, install an extra lock on any window that's easily accessible from the outside.
- Leave all windows and doors locked whenever possible.
- Keep emergency phone numbers posted near all phones and have an escape plan in mind in case any usual escape route is blocked.
- Consider installing an electronic security system. The police can recommend various types. Dogs also make excellent and relatively inexpensive “security systems.”
- If you live in a controlled-access apartment building, never “buzz in” a stranger. Ask your building manager how to handle situations where a stranger is waiting until you enter or leave to get inside the building. Also ask if you may add a second fictitious name to the posted tenant listing so a potential thief will think you don't live alone.

Dealing With Intruders

If you see signs that a thief might be in the home or prowling outside when you return, leave immediately and call the police. If you're home and hear what you think might be an intruder breaking in, turn on lights and make “normal” noise, such as turning on a TV. If the intruder is already inside, lock your door, call the police and grab anything that can be used as a weapon. Use it only if you can't otherwise escape. If the intruder confronts you, don't act like you want to fight or resist him. Try to remember anything about him that might help the police and call them as soon as the intruder has left. Don't try to argue with an armed person.

While You're Away From Home

Suspend newspaper delivery and have the post office hold your mail. Don't mention your absence on your phone-answering machine. Get lights that turn on automatically when it gets dark or get a timer to turn them on. Ask a neighbor to keep an eye on the house and not let debris build up around your front door. If your absence will be no more than two or three days, leave your car parked in your driveway to make it look like someone is home. Disconnect an electric garage door opener and have your lawn mowed or snow shoveled while you're on vacation.