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Tom Baecker
Agency Owner

Baecker Agency, Inc.
373 Pedersen Street, Suite 104
St. Paul, MN 55119
P 651-730-6666
F 651-730-4354
Toll Free 1-877-730-4678
Email: BaeckerAgency@Allstate.com
www.BaeckerAgency.com

"Special Report"

What You Need To Know To Protect Your Home While on Vacation...

By Tom Baecker
Baecker Agency, Inc.

Have you taken the necessary steps to protect your home while you are away? Whether you are going away for the weekend or taking an extended holiday you'll enjoy yourself more if you know you've been smart about protecting your home.

In 2006 burglary accounted for 21.9% of the estimated number of property crimes. The total cost of this to victims of burglary is estimated at \$4 BILLION in lost property. Don't become another statistic; the next time you're away from home, incorporate these easy steps to secure and protect your home and valuables.

1. **Stop the mail and the presses.** Most people remember to stop the mail and the newspaper, but what about neighborhood flyers, phone book deliveries, and other advertisements? Ask a neighbor or trusted friend to stop by your house occasionally while you are gone to make sure your front entrance is clear.
2. **Avoid predictable patterns.** Many people use timers while they are away to give the illusion of an occupied house. For a few dollars more you can pick up randomized timers that turn on and off at various 15 minute intervals. Don't forget to put porch lights and other outdoor lights on timers too. A porch light that stays on 24 hours a day is like a shining beacon calling out to burglars.
3. **Don't forget the phone.** Turn the ringer down, so outsiders won't hear a jangling, unanswered telephone. Most importantly, avoid the temptation to leave a message saying you're out of town.

4. **Keep treasures safe.** It's good idea to keep irreplaceable items in a safe. Just be sure the safe is bolted down to the floor or secured to the wall. If a safe doesn't sound like a good idea check with your bank to find out about safe deposit boxes. The cost is usually nominal and you can rest easy knowing important documents and small treasure like jewelry are safely stored.
5. **Landscaping 101.** Hire someone to keep the lawn mowed, watered, and maintained. Don't forget to keep shrubs and trees trimmed away from your house. This will discourage burglars from trying to hide in the foliage. If you're planning a winter get-a-way be sure to have someone keep walkways clear and lived in looking by shoveling the snow.

These simple steps may seem obvious, but you'll feel better if you include them in your vacation plans. There's nothing worse than returning home to find you've become a victim of a burglary or other criminal mischief.

Crime isn't the only thing to think about while you are away.

There are many things that can go wrong when you are on vacation: bad weather, water damage, and fire are just some of the issues homeowners face. You don't have to be home to have something happen.

So while you're hiring the neighbor boy to cut the lawn and asking your friends to stop by and pick up mail or newspapers, be sure to put these on your list too.

If you're going away during warmer months:

- If you will be gone for a week or more it might be a good idea to turn off the water to your toilets, sink, and washing machine. A broken pipe can cause thousands of dollars in damage.
- Your water heater won't be in use; so save money and power by turning it down. Just remember to turn it back up again when you return.

For winter vacationers:

- Allow water to drip (very slowly) from a faucet on an exterior wall. And make sure whoever is watching your home knows where the water main shut off is located in case of a busted pipe.
- Set the heat in your home to no lower than 55 degrees.
- Keep downspouts and gutters clean to prevent ice dams on your roof.
- Disconnect all garden hoses.

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- Locate and insulate pipes most susceptible to freezing.
- Leave cabinet doors open to allow for warm air to circulate around un-insulated pipes.

No matter when you plan to be away make sure your smoke detector is working properly. Leave your itinerary including hotel names and phone numbers with a trusted friend so if there is an emergency you can be contacted right away.

Make copies of any important homeowner's documents, such as insurance policies, etc., and always keep them in a second location outside of your home. Whether you give them to a family member or store them in a safe deposit box, you'll have documentation of your belongings and policies should damage occur to your home while you're gone.

Try not to worry. Crime rates have fallen significantly since 1991 and the chances of something happening to your home while you're gone are small and with these precautions, you can enjoy a stress-free vacation. So, relax and enjoy your vacation!

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