

Home

H O M E - P R O T E C T I O N T I P S F O R ' S N O W B I R D S '

Heading south for the winter? Whether you're taking a short vacation or migrating with the "snowbirds," make sure you protect your home inside and out. Vacations give burglars ample time and opportunity to do their dirty work. Mechanical failures also can render vacant homes a mess.

P R O T E C T A G A I N S T D A M A G E

- Turn off your main water valve, unless you have an automatic fire-sprinkler system. In that case, turn off the water valves to your washing machine, icemaker, and dishwasher. Those lines and hoses might break while you're away and flood your home. (Note: When you shut off your main water valve, your outdoor faucets also will be inoperative.)
- Turn off your air conditioner and water heater. To keep pipes from freezing, set your furnace no lower than 55 degrees. Open vanity and cabinet doors to let warm air circulate around the plumbing. If you have oil or propane heat, make sure your tank has enough fuel to last while you're gone.
- Make sure a trusted neighbor knows the essentials about your home. Point out the water shut-off, main gas valve, and how to turn off electricity in case of an emergency.
- Protect outside pipes and faucets from freezing. Disconnect hoses and drain sprinkler systems. Cover faucets with styrofoam hoods. Use heat tape or thermostatically controlled heat cables to wrap pipes. Be sure to use heat sources that are intended for outside use and approved by an independent testing organization.
- Unplug TVs, computers, and appliances susceptible to lightning and power surges.

P R O T E C T A G A I N S T T H E F T

- Remove messages from your telephone answering machine daily. Don't record a message saying you're out of town. Turn down phone and answering-machine volumes so that unanswered calls won't tip off a burglar prowling outside.
- Place timers on indoor lamps and appliances to light your home after dark. Set timers to turn on radios randomly during the day and evening.
- Install an outdoor motion-sensor light to discourage burglars.
- Take jewelry and valuable papers to a safe-deposit box.
- Find the serial numbers and model numbers of your valuables: TV, stereo, camera, etc., and store the information in a safe-deposit box.

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- If you leave a car in the garage, lock it. Don't rely on your automatic garage door opener for security.
- Tell your trusted neighbors you'll be away and for how long. Leave a key and ask for an occasional house check – you can return the favor some day. Leave a travel itinerary and a phone number where you can be reached in an emergency.

THE BASICS

- Lock all windows, doors, pet entrances, garage doors, and backyard gates. Wedge dowels in door and window tracks to prevent burglars from prying them open.
- Advise your alarm company and local police if you'll be gone for an extended time, so they can check your home periodically.
- Don't advertise that your home is vacant – give it a “lived-in” look. Keep some shades, blinds, or curtains ajar to maintain a normal appearance. Ask a neighbor to park in your driveway.
- Don't let mail and newspapers accumulate. That's a sure sign to crooks that no one is home. Stop the paper and have the post office hold your mail, or ask a trusted neighbor to pick it up. Also ask your neighbor to remove any advertising fliers left on your property.
- Trim shrubs and bushes away from windows and doors so burglars won't be able to break in unobserved.
- Consider installing a burglar alarm.
- Depending on the weather, arrange to have your lawn and other shrubs trimmed or your driveways and walks shoveled to maintain that lived-in appearance.

