



Some Holiday Crime Prevention Safety Tips from Neighborhood Watch

With many of us planning travel for the upcoming Holidays, here are some suggestions to help keep your property and belongings safer while you're out of town -- and will keep you from obsessing about security once you're on the road.

Neighbors helping Neighbors

The best way to make sure your house is safe while you're traveling is to have someone you trust still living in it. You may be lucky enough to have a relative or friend who'll move in temporarily and water the plants, feed the pets and pick up the newspapers, etc. However, if this option isn't available, the next best way to gain peace of mind while traveling is to ask a friend or neighbor to keep an eye on your house while you're away.

Give this person a key (and any security system passcodes) so that they can bring your mail in, feed your cat, water your plants, etc. Don't mark the key with your name and/or address – use some code to identify (such as your nickname) that they would easily associate with you. If someone should get into your neighbor's house you don't want to provide easy access to your home as well.

If you leave a car in the driveway, you may also want to give them a key to your car—you never know when your vehicle may need to be moved. They should also have your contact information and a copy of your itinerary in case of emergencies.

If you plan to have more than one person visiting your house while you're away, make sure you tell them about each other.

Don't Tip Off Criminals on the Web

The anonymity of the internet can encourage us to share personal information without fully realizing that there may be hundreds of complete strangers receiving our daily musings. Think twice about posting your detailed vacation plans on social media—especially if that information is visible to internet users other than your friends and family (and it probably is).

Be careful what you say on your answering machine or voice mail too. Callers don't need to know that you're not home—they just need to know that you can't come to the phone right now.

Notify COPS (Loudon County Citizen Observer Patrol) for House Checks

COPs are a cooperative effort between the Loudon County Sheriff's Office and volunteers concerned about the welfare and safety of Tellico Village residents. It is an ancillary service of the Sheriff's Office where trained volunteers patrol in Tellico Village of Loudon County ((unfortunately not available in Kahite) observing and reporting any problems or suspicious activity. House checks are performed in Tellico Village where they do a physical check of the house by making a complete 360 degree walk-around (conditions permitting) and regularly patrol the neighborhood where the home is located.

If you want the COPS to check your home while you are away, please fill out a "House Check" request form and take it to the TV Welcome Center or Tanasi Club House and drop it in the "WHITE COP BOX". The forms can be picked up at either drop-off location or printed from the link below.

[//sites.google.com/site/loudoncountycops/](https://sites.google.com/site/loudoncountycops/)

What about your Curtains or Shutters

You may decide to close your curtains and/or shutters to prevent people from peering inside your home to see whether you're there. However, closed curtains also stop those who aim to help—the police, your neighbors or friends—from seeing inside your house. Better to leave your windows exactly as you usually keep them when you're home, since noticeable changes could hint that you're not around anymore—especially if your curtains are uncharacteristically left closed for two weeks. Move expensive items, like jewelry or computers, out of plain sight if they're visible from the window.

What about Lights?

Don't leave your lights on at home throughout your entire vacation in an effort to make it look like someone is in the house. House lights on throughout the night might be a bit suspicious. Instead, use a light switch timer that can turn your lights on and off automatically according to a programmed schedule.

Consider installing motion detectors on your outside lights which trigger when someone is inside the range of the sensor.

Stop Your Mail

Either place a "stop" order on mail and newspapers or arrange to have a friend or neighbor pick up your mail while you're away. It's easy to put your mail on hold at USPS.com or the link below:

[//holdmail.usps.com/holdmail/](https://holdmail.usps.com/holdmail/)

Even if you stop your mail/newspapers, make sure someone checks your mailbox to remove any fliers that may be stuffed and visible to observers indicating a prolonged absence.

Trash & Recycling

Avoid placing trash or recycling out early — or leaving it out late: Trash containers that are out of line with the rest of the neighborhood stick out like a sore thumb to burglars. Avoid the temptation to just put them out before you leave and bring them back in when you return, as bins out on any day but a trash day will beckon burglars. Don't put them out until you get back, or better yet, if you can get a neighbor to take out your garbage and put the can back after the garbage pickup, it's another way to send the message that everything is proceeding normally at your house.

Anticipate a Cold Snap?

If you think your pipes may be in danger of freezing you have another good reason to leave a house key with a friend while you're traveling. Ask your friend to stop by and check your faucets. If they turn on a faucet and only a few drops of water come out, your pipes may be frozen.

Take other precautions like making sure your pipes are properly insulated and keeping your heat on while you're away. Show your key-bearing companion the location of the water main shut-off in case a pipe breaks.

Pull the Plug

Unplug your television, computer, toaster oven, and other appliances to protect them from power surges. This will help you save power as well; many appliances draw energy even when they're turned off.

Turning off your garage door is also an effective way to keep thieves from opening it.

Remove Your Spare Key

If a criminal figures out you're away on vacation they may check your porch for a spare key. So reach under the mat, into the mailbox, above the door frame, or into the flower pot and remove your spare key before you leave on your vacation.

Parking at the Airport

Don't leave a portable GPS in your car when you use long-term parking at the airport. It could provide thieves with a convenient road map to your house where they can use your garage door opener (unless unplugged) for easy access to your garage.

Hopefully the above tips will help in making your vacation more enjoyable both during your trip and upon your return. If anyone has any suggestions or comments please contact Ken Litke at tvnwatch@gmail.com.

References:

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howstuffworks.com. 10 Tips for Keeping Your Home Safe While on Vacation by Sara Elliott

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