

HOW TO SURVIVE A BURGLARY: FIVE TIPS

by Susan Bartelstone, Crime Prevention Specialist

Five places a burglar rarely looks:

- A laundry bag in the bathroom or laundry room
- A washer or dryer filled with clothes
- A “dirty” diaper bag in a child’s room
- In the garage under grimy looking “garage stuff”
- Inside a drop ceiling



According to the FBI, July and August are the months when most property crimes occur—in part because more homeowners are away on vacation or for long weekends. Here are five tips to make your home safer and help you survive a burglary, whenever it might occur:

1. Contact your local police department and arrange for an officer to come to your house or apartment and conduct a **Crime Prevention Survey** to determine your home’s security strengths and weaknesses. If they offer an **Operation ID** program, mark your large items like the TV, computer and car for identification in case of theft and display ID stickers prominently on doors and windows.
2. Homes with an up-to-date alarm system have a significantly lower break-in rate, so a good home security system is a good investment. Make sure the alarm is connected to the police and to a central monitoring station and display a generic sign visibly. **And, turn it on whenever you leave home!**

Make a Home Safety Checklist before you go on vacation with a list of all the things you need to do.

3. **Identity Theft** is often an intended by-product of a burglary. Be cautious with computers, flash drives, **medical records**, checkbooks, bills or papers that contain your social security number or confidential information. Store them, as well as cash and jewelry, in a safe deposit box or a professionally-installed floor safe hidden under a rug in the dining room, laundry room or a child’s room. Too expensive? Leave them in the care of a trusted relative or friend off premises or buy specially designed fake objects, such as books, candles, food or hairspray cans or closet hangars, for their storage. They’re quite effective. And, look into getting homeowners insurance with an **ID Theft rider**. Better safe, etc.

4. Your most valuable property isn’t your money or jewelry. Don’t forget to hide priceless items like home movies, photo albums or sentimental mementos; also, guns and weapons.

5. Unless your Facebook and other social media privacy settings are set for good friends and family only, don’t announce your vacation plans beforehand or tweet endearing photos of the family at the luau. Wait until you come home to share because tech-savvy burglars are now checking social media sites to determine their next target. And, don’t change your home answering machine announcement either. Forward calls to your cell phone.

No absolutes exist in crime scenarios and no advice can address every variable. Sometimes nothing can be done to prevent an undesirable outcome.