

# **How to Keep Your Home Safe**

## **131 Great Ideas for Keeping Your House Safe**

**By Judith Brown**

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### **1. Preventing Accidents in the Home**

To avoid accidents, wipe up spilled water, grease, and other liquids from your kitchen, bathroom, and garage floors as soon as possible.

Anchor rolled up sections of carpet firmly to prevent someone from tripping.

Secure throw rugs 'with nonskid pads and don't use them at the top or bottom of a flight of stairs.

If your basement stairs are to be painted, add a little sand to the paint for a better grip, or install rubber or abrasive treads.

If you staple burlap to the bottom step of a ladder, you'll have a scraper for your shoes. This way you won't have any slippery substances left on your shoes.

If someone in the family frequently gets out of bed in the middle of the night, paint door edges with luminous paint to help that person avoid running into the door in the dark.

To prevent grease fires, keep the stove clear of pot holders, paper napkins, and towels when frying food.

Keep baking powder on hand for extinguishing a kitchen fire in an emergency.

Don't put hot tea, coffee, or other hot liquids on a table cloth that hangs way over the side of the table. Someone could trip on the cloth and spill the scalding liquid.

Keep the gas cook-top away from open windows where curtains could blow into the flames or where wind could extinguish the cooking flames.

When handing a knife to someone else, always hold the point turned away from the other person.

Keep the handles of pots and frying pans turned inward on the kitchen range so that they cannot be knocked or tipped over by accident.

This is especially important if there are young children in the household.

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## **2. Keeping the Home Safe for Children**

Check all your child's toys to be sure any eyes, noses, knobs, or other parts will not come off when pulled or chewed.

Never leave a small child unattended in the bathtub.

In the bathtub! face your child toward the hot water faucet so he won't accidentally bump into the hot metal.

Don't hold a child on your lap while you drink or pass a hot beverage, or while you smoke.

Tie a bell around all bottles and containers that hold poisonous materials in the house to alert you to your child getting into something dangerous.

Store all your poisonous materials on high shelves, out of the reach of children. And remember to label the containers.

Some poison control centers supply stickers to put on dangerous chemicals so that a child understands that they are harmful. Ask if these are available in your locality.

It's best never to place pillows in an infant's crib and. to keep the crib completely away from the cord of a Venetian blind.

Never place a plastic bag or thin plastic covering within reach of an infant or small child, or near the child's bed.

Remove the plastic spray nozzle from old aerosol cans when you discard them. You lessen the risk of children finding the cans and spraying chemicals into their own or their playmates' eyes.

Keep home workshop tools disconnected, and lock switches and power supplies so a child can't turn them on.

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## **3. Preventing Fires**

Walk your family through a fire drill so everyone knows what to do and where to go in case of fire. Make sure children know just where the family will reunite if they have to leave the house in case of fire.

Assign a special closet to combustible materials and dangerous tools that you don't want your children to touch. Put a good lock on the door and a heat detector inside to alert you of any fire danger.

Every room in the house should have at least two escape exits.

If you have school-age children, make sure that the school carries out regular fire drills and that the children know where to go and what to do in case of fire.

Don't overload electrical circuits with too many appliances.

Replace frayed electrical cords before they burn or cause a fire.

Don't run extension cords under the rugs.

The cords wear easily and may short out, causing a fire.

Keep combustibles away from the furnace, which can give off flames or sparks at times.

For basic protection at minimum expense, locate one smoke detector in the hallway near each separate sleeping area. (More complete protection calls for a detector on every level of a home.)

Don't mount a smoke detector in areas where the alarm can be triggered inappropriately such as by smoke from cooking, steam from the shower, or in the garage where combustion products from the car's engine can set it off.

Remember that smoke detectors are unreliable below 40° F.

Some fire departments supply stickers that can be placed in a window to alert firefighters to the presence of a child or an elderly or handicapped person. Inquire if such stickers are available in your locality.

If you live or work in a high-rise building, locate the fire exits on your floor. If an alarm sounds, remember that you should always use the fire stairs, not the elevator.

Learn to distinguish the sound of a fire alarm in your building from the sound of an elevator alarm bell. If you think someone's trapped in the elevator when, in fact, the building is starting to go up in flames, you could be in serious trouble.

Never enter a public place, including a restaurant, without noticing where all exits are. If they're chained, barred, locked, or obstructed, complain to the management. If you get the cold shoulder, turn on your heels and leave. Management will soon get the message.

### **Fire Fighting Do's and Don'ts**

Never use water on electric, oil, or grease fires. Water will only spatter the flames.

If you can't shut off the gas before fighting a gas fire, get out of the house immediately.

If you can't remove the fuel from a wood, paper, or fabric fire, cut off its air by smothering the fire with a coat or heavy woolen blanket. You might also cool the fire with water, a fire extinguisher, sand, or earth.

Distribute fire extinguishers in key areas such as the kitchen, bedrooms, workshop, and garage.

Never spend more than 30 seconds fighting a fire. If the fire can't be extinguished, warn others, get out of the house, and call the fire department.

Even if a fire is confined to a frying pan or wastebasket, never spend more than 30 seconds fighting the fire. Small fires can grow with frightening speed.

Never reenter a burning house for any reason.

Leave fire fighting to the professionals as soon as they're on the scene.

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#### **4. Electrical and Storm Safety**

Do not place an electric appliance where it can fall in water.

Never touch an electric appliance while you are standing in water.

Don't place electric heaters near combustible materials.

As a safety precaution before leaving the house on vacation, unplug all electrical appliances except for those lights connected to automatic timers.

If you live in a storm-prone area, nail down roof shingles or use adequate adhesive to keep them from blowing off in a violent wind. For roofs with shingles that are not the seal-down type, apply a little dab of roofing cement under each tab.

Alert your local police department if you discover downed power lines. Set up barricades to keep others away from the area until help arrives.

A lightning protection system should offer an easy, direct path for the bolt to follow into the ground and thus prevent injury or damage while the bolt is traveling that path.

Grounding rods (at least 2 for a small house) should be placed at opposite corners of the house.

Keep an eye on large trees—even healthy ones—that could damage your house if felled in a storm. Cut them back if necessary.

Store a lantern, pick, shovel, crowbar, hammer, screwdriver, and pliers in your storm shelter.

If the exit becomes blocked you may have to dig your way out. Store canned food and bottled water, too.

The basement is not a good shelter during a tornado because it's too close to gas pipes, sewer pipes, drains, and cesspool. A better shelter would be underground, far from the house (in case the roof falls) and away from the gas and sewer system.

In a hurricane, don't go out unless you have to. However, if flooding threatens seek high ground and follow the instructions of civil defense personnel.

A spare tire in the trunk of your car can be used as a life preserver in a flooding or drowning emergency. Make sure the tire is in good shape. When a major storm is imminent, close

shutters, board windows, or tape the inside of larger panes with an "X" along the full length of their diagonals. Even a light material like masking tape may give the glass the extra margin of strength it needs to resist cracking. Exception: When a tornado threatens, leave windows slightly ajar.

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## **5. Handling Insecticides**

Never spray insecticides near a flame, furnace, lighted stove, or pilot light.

Keep insecticide sprays away from children, pets, dishes, foods, and cooking utensils.

Avoid contact with the pesticide and don't inhale its fumes.

When fumigating, use only the amount of pesticide required for the job.

Change clothes after spraying, and store insecticides in a safe place.

Never flush insecticides down the toilet, sewer, or drains.

Never smoke while using pesticide, and wash your hands before handling a cigarette afterwards.

As soon as you have used a space spray (bomb), leave the room. Close the room up tightly for at least half an hour, then ventilate.

Do not reuse insecticide containers. Rinse and dispose of them.

Never hang a chemically treated pest strip in a room where people will be present for any length of time, especially the sick, the elderly, or children.

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## **6. Guarding Against Burglars and Intruders**

Plan to burgle yourself. In this game, you'll discover any weaknesses in your home protection that may have previously escaped your notice.

Before turning your house key over to a professional housecleaner for several hours, make sure the person is honest and reputable as well as hard-working. Check all references thoroughly by telephone. If the housecleaner is from a firm, call your local Better Business Bureau to check on the firm's reputation. Make sure the firm insures its employees against accidents and theft.

Instead of keeping a spare key in a mailbox, under the door mat, or on a nail behind the garage, wrap the key in foil-or put it in a 3Smm film can or a pipe tobacco can-and bury it where you can easily find it if you need it.

If your plans to be away from home have been publicized through a funeral, wedding, or similar newspaper notice, hire a house sitter. Burglars often read the newspapers to see who's planning to be away from home all day or for several days.

Lock up your home, even if you go out only for a short time. Many burglars just walk in through an unlocked door or window.

If a check or money is being sent to you, try to have a family member at home when the mail arrives.

Your house should appear occupied at all times. Use timers to switch lights and radios on and off when you're not at home.

Try to vary your daily schedule of departures and arrivals, etc. so that your schedule is not easily predictable.

Ask your neighbors to use your garbage cans when you're on vacation, so your absence won't be so evident.

Safeguard your home by not leaving notes for workmen or family members on the door.

If you're going to be away from home for several days-or even for just one day-adjust your telephone ring to its lowest volume. To a prowler, an unanswered phone is a quick tip that your home is empty.

Arrange to have newspaper delivery stopped when you're away from home, and have a neighbor pick up your mail.

Let neighbors know of any suspicious-looking person or strange cars you notice lurking about.

Keep your curtains drawn or remove valuables to rooms where they can't be seen from outside.

To prevent burglars from stealing ladders stored outdoors, padlock them to something that cannot be moved.

To keep your tools from being stolen, paint the handles. Thieves avoid items that are easy to identify.

Trees located near windows, or shrubbery that might shield a burglar from view, can be major flaws in your home protection plan.

Dogs are among the best deterrents to burglars; even a small, noisy dog can be effective—burglars do not like to have attention drawn to their presence.

For the most effective alarm system, conceal all wiring. A burglar looks for places where he can disconnect the security system.

A door with too much space between the door and the frame is an invitation for the burglar to use a jimmy. Reinforce such a door by attaching a panel of  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch plywood or a piece of sheet metal to it.

If there are door hinges on the outside of your house, take down the door and reset the hinges inside. Otherwise all a thief has to do to gain entry to your home is knock out the hinge pin.

You can burglar-proof your glass patio doors by setting a pipe or metal bar in the inside bottom track of the door slide. The pipe should be the same length as the track.

It's easy for a burglar to pry his way through rot, so replace rotted door frames with new, solid wood.

It's simple for a thief to break glass panels and then reach in and open a doorknob from the inside. A door with glass panels should be either fortified or replaced.

## **Locks and Bolts**

Protect your windows with one or more good locks, an alarm system, burglar-resistant glass, or many small panes instead of one large area of glass.

When putting window locks on, have all the locks keyed alike and give each family member a key. Keep a key near the window where children can get it (but a burglar can't reach it) in case of fire.

After installing a window lock, drip some solder onto the screw heads. That will stop a burglar from unscrewing the lock after cutting a small hole in the window pane.

It can be a problem to lock an aluminum sliding window in a ventilating position. A locking sliding window bolt allows high security as it foils entry even if the glass is broken.

To help burglar-proof your home, install 1-inch throw deadbolt locks on all exterior doors.

A spring-latch lock is easy prey for burglars who are "loiding" experts. Loiding is the method of slipping a plastic credit card against the latch tongue to depress it and unlock the door. A dead-bolt defies any such attack. It is only vulnerable when there is enough space between the door and its frame to allow an intruder to use power tools or a hacksaw. But using tools takes time-to the burglar's disadvantage.

Change your lock cylinders from time to time, just in case someone has gotten hold of a set of your keys. If you lose your keys, change the cylinder immediately.

When you move into a new house, it's a good idea to change all the locks and tumblers.

In a rented house, install a double cylinder lock that requires a key to open it from the inside as well as from the outside. If a thief breaks through the panel and reaches in, he still has the lock to deal with instead of just a knob.

### **Protecting Your Valuables**

If you don't have a safe, or feel you don't need one, find good hiding places for your valuables in your home. An acoustical tile ceiling offers good hiding possibilities.

Remove a tile and restore it

afterwards with magnetic fastener or a similar device. However, be careful not to leave finger marks.

You can keep your jewelry safe by installing a wall-outlet safe. When the safe is closed, it looks just like an electrical outlet. When buying a wall safe, be sure it's fireproof as well as burglar-proof.

A chiseled-out space in the top of a door makes a great "safe" for small valuables. Or you might devise a hiding place in a false ceiling.

Fireplace logs can be hollowed out to make hiding places, too. Other ideas include the underside of desktops, linings of drapes, underneath insulation in the attic, inside a lamp. Avoid the

obvious places such as mattresses, drawers, inside figurines, behind pictures, and under carpets.

Hollow out the leg on a table or chair for hiding small objects. Drill from the bottom, then cap all the legs with rubber tips.

Are you worried about someone entering your house through your attached garage? If the garage door lifts on a track a C-clamp can provide extra security since the door cannot be opened if you tighten the C-clamp on the track next to the roller.

Another way to increase garage security is to install a peephole in the door separating the house from the garage. If you hear suspicious sounds, you can check without opening the door.

If you frost or cover your garage windows, burglars won't be able to tell if your car is gone.

Keep your garage door closed and locked even when your car is not in the garage.

### **Avoiding Pickpockets**

When shopping, watch for pickpockets in places like the checkout counter where you normally lay down your purse or parcel. Also be alert at store entrances, on escalators and in elevators, in bargain areas, or in demonstration areas.

When shopping, it's best to carry a zippered shoulder bag with any outside pockets facing toward you. Don't carry large amounts of cash, and divide your cash among the purse, your eyeglasses case, and inner clothes pockets.

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