



# Crime Prevention Guide

Keep Your Property, Home & Neighborhood Safe



**San Rafael  
Police Department**

# Make Safety a Priority

Everyone can take responsibility for reducing crime—even you. This guide can help you take the steps necessary to protect your property and home, not to mention yourself and your family. Review it and use its guidelines to keep crime at bay and to make your community a nicer place to live.

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# Keep Your Home Safe from Crime

Home burglary is one of the most frequent crimes, but also one of the most preventable. Use these tips to protect your home and belongings.

## Basic Crime-Stoppers

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- Lock your doors and keep valuables out of plain sight.
- Leave spare keys in well-hidden places around the exterior of your home. Thieves will look in mailboxes, under doormats, and above doorways.
- Install a monitored burglar alarm system, if it fits your budget.
- Keep your name off your mailbox and door. Burglars can use this information to find your home phone number or check social media to see if you're home.
- Change your locks right away if you lose your house key.
- Invest in a safe-deposit box or a secure fireproof home safe, preferably one that is too heavy to be moved.
- Avoid leaving notes on your door for service people or others.
- Lock up your house when going out, even just for a few minutes.
- Keep the door locked if anyone comes to your door wanting to use your phone. Offer to make the call for them yourself.
- Ask to see credentials of any salespeople who come to your house. They can push their ID under the door, or you can call their office before letting them in.
- Avoid obvious places to hide expensive possessions, such as under mattresses or in drawers.



## Crime-Proof the Outside of Your Home

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- Light all potential entry points to your home and garage (including doors and first-floor windows).
- Use low-voltage bulbs to light porches, carports, and walkways.
- Install outdoor lights high overhead where burglars can't reach them.
- Consider installing photocell lights, which come on automatically at dusk and stay on until dawn, or use motion sensor lights, which come on when a person walks past them.
- Trim shrubbery and bushes so they are below your windows and not blocking doors or walkways.
- Consider planting thorny bushes under or around windows.
- Keep fencing from hiding doors, walkways, or windows, or from serving as an aid to reach windows or balconies.
- Lock up ladders and tools that may help a burglar break in.
- Frost or cover garage windows so that burglars won't be able to see when your car is not there.
- Keep your garage door closed and locked at all times.
- Have a small peephole in the door separating your house from the garage. If you hear noises from the garage, you can check to see what is happening without opening the door.
- Install window bars or grills on any outbuildings, especially if they have expensive items in them such as lawnmowers, tools, and gardening equipment.





## Secure Doors and Windows

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- Put in a door with a wide-angle peephole that allows you to view who is outside without having to open it.
- Install heavy-duty 1-inch deadbolt locks on all exterior doors.
- Set a pipe or metal bar snugly in the middle bottom track of the door slide on sliding glass doors.
- Check that no door has too much space between it and the frame. A gap as small as 1/8-inch can be pried open with a crowbar. If necessary, reinforce doors with plywood or sheet metal.
- Have door hinges fitted on the inside. Otherwise, a burglar could enter your home by knocking out the hinge pins.
- Install locks on all windows that can open. Be sure that family members know how to open the windows from the inside in case of an emergency.
- Check local laws and regulations if you are considering installing security bars. Most areas require quick-release bars so they can be opened quickly from the inside.
- Familiarize everyone in your family with how to operate window security features.
- Make sure windows have burglar-resistant glass.







# Pre-Vacation Home Security Checklist

Prevent your home from being burglarized when you're on vacation or away from home for an extended period of time. Use this checklist to help keep your home safe while you're gone.

- Write down the names and telephone numbers of where you can be reached as well as the dates you'll be gone. Give copies to trusted friends and family members.
- Ask a trusted friend or neighbor to check your home every few days. Perhaps that person could even park in your driveway while you're away.
- Make arrangements for lawn care or snow removal.
- Keep shades and blinds in their normal positions.
- Move large valuables away from windows.
- Put some lights and radios on electronic timers.
- Adjust your landline telephone ring to its lowest volume. An unanswered phone could tip off a burglar that you're away.
- Stop delivery of newspapers and mail, or have a neighbor collect them for you.
- Make sure all your door and window locks are in working order, and be sure to lock up your house before leaving.





# Know What to Do if You Are Burglarized

Decrease your chances of being victimized by a burglary by increasing the safety measures you take. Use these suggestions in case a burglary does occur.

## If your home is burglarized while you are away...

- Stay outside of your home if you find anything questionable (broken window, open door, etc.).
- Go to a neighbor's house or use your cell phone to call 911.
- Keep from touching anything in your home until the police are done investigating. Otherwise, you may destroy evidence.



## If someone breaks in while you are home...

- Try to stay calm.
- Resist confronting the burglar.
- Leave the house if possible. Then, call 911 from a safe location.
- Lock yourself in a room with a phone and call 911 immediately if you can't escape.



## Help the Police by Staying Alert

If you see the law being broken, pay close attention. You can help the police identify the suspect. Make note of race, sex, hair, eyes, age, height, weight, clothes, scars, or markings. Also note the vehicle license plate, make, and color; direction of escape; number of suspects; and type of weapon. Even if a crime hasn't been committed, report any suspicious activity you notice in your neighborhood.

# Protect Yourself Out in the Community

Pay attention when you're out in public to stay safe and protect yourself and your belongings. Practice these safety measures.

- Be aware of situations where people distract you, such as when people bump into you or drop objects in front of you when you're in a crowd.
- Go with a friend or family member when walking, cycling, or jogging. Stay in well-traveled areas. Be alert and appear confident.
- Keep a tight grip on your purse. Never put it loosely over your shoulder or carry it by the strap. Don't place your purse on the floor in the restroom or on your lap without holding onto it, and never leave it unattended.
- Leave expensive jewelry and excessive cash at home.
- Put your wallet in your front pocket or inside jacket pocket.
- Wait for buses and other means of public transportation at busy, well-lit stops, if possible. Sit close to the front of the bus.
- Check inside elevators before getting on. If you feel uncomfortable, don't get on. If you're on the elevator and feel uneasy, get off as soon as possible.
- Have your key ready as you approach your car door or the door to your home.



# Vacation with Safety in Mind

Deter thieves and prevent crimes that you may encounter on vacation. Follow these suggestions when you're traveling.

- Purchase special clothing or accessories to hide your passport, money, or credit cards. Keep the majority of your funds hidden.
- Leave excessive jewelry at home.
- Keep handbags in front of you and closed with the fastening toward your body. If possible, keep your wallet in your front pants pocket.
- Beware of being jostled or bumped when you're in a crowd. Pickpockets could be trying to distract you.
- Be careful when you use your cell phone. Don't leave it out on a table—keep it in your purse or pocket.
- Place valuables in a hotel safe-deposit box or room safe. Don't leave them out in the open in your hotel room.
- Familiarize yourself with escape routes in hotels so you can act quickly in case of an emergency.



# Protect Yourself When Driving

Stay alert and safe no matter where you're driving—whether in your community or in an unfamiliar place. Take these measures for your personal safety.

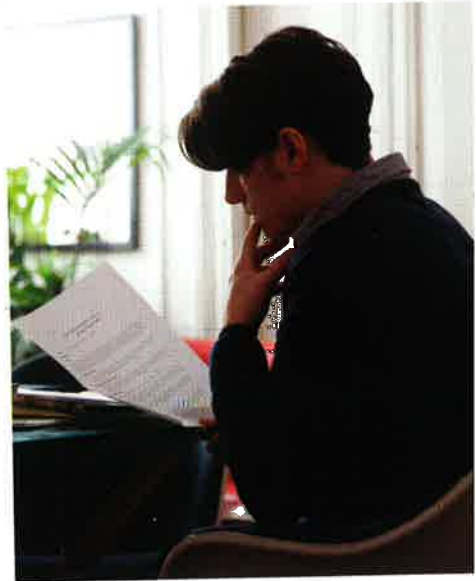
- Drive past hitchhikers. Never pick them up.
- Raise the hood of your vehicle if you have trouble on the road. Turn on your emergency flashers. If you have an antenna, attach something white on it. When people stop to help, don't get out of the car unless you know them or it's the police.
- Keep your car doors locked and your windows up until you are in a safe location if you find yourself driving in an unfamiliar, dangerous-looking area.
- Find the nearest police station, a hotel, or other public facility if you are being followed or harassed by another driver. Once you find a safe place, park as close as you can and get inside fast.
- Continue driving and try to get away if another driver tries forcing you to pull over or cuts you off. If it doesn't put you in danger, note the license plate number of the car and a description of the car and driver.
- Park in a spot with good lighting that is close to a location where there are lots of people. Lock valuables in the trunk and lock all doors.
- Walk to your car with your keys in your hand.



# Avoid Fraud and Cons

Stop fraud by reporting it. Only one-third of victims of scam artists report it to the police; however, notifying the authorities helps prevent criminals from taking advantage of you or someone else in the future. Take these measures to protect yourself from scams.

- Contact the Better Business Bureau if you're suspicious of a business. Look it up online at [www.bbb.org/us](http://www.bbb.org/us) for more information.
- Be sure the company is reputable if you're expected to pay for services ahead of time.
- Read everything in a contract before you sign it. Don't sign anything if you feel nervous about it, do not understand it, or are being pressured to sign. If necessary, see a lawyer.
- Beware of overly friendly strangers who are trying to sell you something. Con artists report that the key to selling a scam is to first become friendly with the victim.
- Stop the conversation if a salesperson won't give you straight answers.
- Be wary of contests, giveaways, sweepstakes, free vacation offers, and cures for illness or aging. Take your time and research all offers thoroughly.





# Guard Against Identity Theft

Protect yourself from identity theft, the fastest-growing crime in our country. Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personal information (such as Social Security number, credit card, or name) without your knowledge or permission to open accounts and/or make financial transactions and purchases. Take these precautions.

- Share personal information, such as your Social Security, bank account, or credit card numbers over the phone, only if you initiated the call and know who you are talking to.
- Report the loss to the issuers right away if your credit/debit cards are lost or stolen.
- Make sure that no other customer in a store sees your name and credit/debit card number.
- Keep your PIN number and passwords separate from account information. Don't carry them with your credit/debit cards. Memorize them instead.
- Shred any papers containing personal records or information before throwing them into the garbage or recycling them.
- Review monthly credit/debit card and bank statements for unauthorized transactions.
- Check your credit report at least once a year. By federal law, each of the main consumer reporting companies is required to give you a free copy of your credit report annually. To order yours,
  - Request by phone by calling 877-322-8228; or
  - Download online from [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com); or
  - Receive by mail by:
    1. printing out and completing the request form at <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/manualRequestForm.action>
    2. mailing the form to: Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281.

# Keep Your Accounts Safe

Be careful with your money and do your research to protect it. Take these necessary steps to secure your assets.

- Use banks and credit unions that are insured by the federal government (FDIC for banks, NCUA for credit unions). This keeps your money safe from loss to thieves, fire, or natural disasters.
- Ask a trusted relative or friend to come with you if you're going to the bank or credit union with valuables.
- Keep a list at home of all the items in your bank or credit union safe-deposit box. Make sure the list is in a safe place, such as a fireproof storage box.
- Get a cashier's check or use a wire transfer if you have to withdraw a large amount of money.
- Tell security or a teller at the bank or credit union if you think you are being followed. Do not leave the building by yourself.



## Be Careful Using the ATM

- Go only during the day.
- Use drive-up ATMs rather than walk-up ATMs if possible.
- Lock your car and take only your debit card and your car keys with you if you're using a walk-up ATM.
- Get back into your car without using the ATM if you see a suspicious-looking person nearby.
- Enter your transaction quickly and scan the area around you. Use one hand to cover the keypad when you enter your PIN number so nobody can see it.
- Take your cash or receipt and debit card and leave quickly.

# Organize a Neighborhood Crime Watch Group

Work to form a neighborhood watch in your community if one doesn't exist already. (If your community has one already, join!) These groups bring together law enforcement and citizens to make communities safer. Use these suggestions to get a group started.

- Contact your local police or sheriff's office. Explain what you'd like to do and commit to working with law enforcement. See what assistance they can offer.
- Think about partnering with an already established organization, such as a citizens' association or housing authority. They can offer helpful information.
- Determine ways to recruit members. Go door-to-door, put an ad in the paper, and/or start a Facebook page. Even those who are homebound can assist. They can be "window watchers" by looking out for any unusual activities.
- Research facts about crime in your community. Review police reports and statistics, and learn how locals feel about crime and safety.
- Organize regular meetings so members can get to know each other and work together to develop strategies, events, and activities. If you live in a diverse neighborhood, be sure that all materials you provide are translated appropriately and that there are translators at the meeting.

## Other Ways to Make Your Community Safer

- Pay attention to situations that can attract crime or make it easier to commit crimes, such as broken street lights or vacant properties.
- Help older citizens go shopping or get to medical appointments. The elderly are easy targets for criminals.