



▶ [Local News](#) ▶ [News](#) ▶ [Education](#) ▶ [Health](#) ▶ [Sports](#) ▶ [Entertainment](#) ▶ [Lifestyles](#) ▶ [Columnists](#) ▶ [Lottery](#) ▶ [Obits](#) ▶ [Opinion](#)

▶ [NorthJersey home](#)
Search
NorthJersey.com
(last 2 weeks)

[Advanced Search](#)
Lifestyles

LIFESTYLES

REAL ESTATE

Preventing burglary while you're on vacation

[E-mail this story](#) [Print this story](#)

Thursday, June 26, 2003

By **ABIGAIL LEICHMAN**
STAFF WRITER

The best way to keep burglars away while you're on vacation is to give the illusion that you're really home.

"You can do several things that present a lived-in look that copies your lifestyle," said Lt. Thomas Bauernschmidt of the Englewood Cliffs Police Department.

Ask a neighbor to bring in mail and newspapers. Program indoor and outdoor lights with timers to mimic your usual schedule. Stop all deliveries. Make sure the lawn is maintained. Program a talk radio or television show to play periodically.

If you normally park in your driveway, ask a neighbor to leave a car there occasionally. If you put your garbage at the curb twice a week, ask a neighbor to do that, too; you can offer to reciprocate when the neighbor goes away.

Most home property crimes are reported in July and August, according to FBI statistics. But a few precautions can reduce the risk.

Start by calling your police department or block-watch captain to tell them you plan to be away, said Frank DeVecchio, director of public safety for Bergen County.

Provide them with phone numbers for you and for someone who has a key to your house (don't leave it under the mat or over the door frame).

"We ask people to give us a call if the house will be vacant even for three or four days," said Bauernschmidt. "Our officers will make extra



RESOURCES

- ▶ [Storefront archive](#) of local store ratings
- ▶ [Hotels, up to 70% off](#)

GUIDES



FUN STUFF

- ▶ [CROSSWORDS](#)
- ▶ [HOROSCOPES](#)
- ▶ [COMICS](#)

NorthJersey.com

- ▶ [Site Map](#)
- ▶ [Help & FAQs](#)
- ▶ [To Advertise](#)
- ▶ [Contact - Internet](#)
- Newspapers**
- ▶ [Subscribe/Services](#)
- ▶ [N.I.E. \(education\)](#)
- ▶ [Contact - Newspapers](#)
- North Jersey Media Group**
- ▶ [www.njmg.com](#)
- ▶ [Partners](#)
- ▶ [GroundZeroSpirit.org](#)
- ▶ [Food Drive](#)

rounds to eyeball the property."

To make their job easier and to deter thieves looking for cover, "make sure hedges are cut away from the windows so police can see the house clearly," DelVecchio suggested.

Most police departments also offer free crime-prevention security surveys. Officers will inspect locks and lighting, alarm systems, and all points of entry, then make recommendations to enhance security.

If you choose to invest in an alarm system, DelVecchio advises getting testimonials from friends and family. "Don't go with a fly-by-night company," he said. "If the price is too good to be true, there's probably a good reason for it."

Bauernschmidt urges homeowners to get three estimates, and he welcomes calls for questions on service details.

Alarm systems work through sensors wired to windows and doors (wireless systems, using tiny battery-operated radio transmitters, can be just as effective). When the system is activated, the sensors maintain magnetic contact.

If that contact is broken, an alarm sounds and a signal is transmitted to a remote monitoring location. The monitor then dials the home number to verify the alarm code.

If no one answers, calls ordinarily go to the local police and a client-designated contact person. DelVecchio said to make sure the company you choose always notifies the police.

Englewood Cliffs is one of the few North Jersey police departments that receives alarm signals directly, rather than having them filtered through a central monitoring station. But wherever the signal is received, it depends upon an intact phone connection.

"Burglars will cut the phone lines as soon as they break into a house," cautioned Bauernschmidt. "We recommend protecting the phone wires in a metal conduit or putting a line sensor on so that if it gets cut, the central station gets a signal. In lieu of that, you should have a backup system, whether a radio signal or a cellular line."

Some companies offer more sophisticated equipment that takes care of the problem automatically, either by converting to a radio signal if the phone line isn't working, or hooking the phone wires themselves to an alarm that emits a siren if they're cut.

Because there are ways to enter a house without breaking the magnetic contact, such as kicking in a door panel, many companies recommend motion sensors you can activate along with the alarm system. If you have pets, however, motion sensors probably aren't for you.

Some companies also offer choices in siren sounds. According to Richard Soloway of NAPCO Security Group, the latest research has shown that voice-recorded sirens are most effective.

"Our speaking sirens [are programmed to] say in English, Spanish, and French, 'Burglar, burglar! You've violated a protected area! Leave immediately!' You can also get a speaking siren for fire alarms that alert you to get out of the house," Soloway said, "so if either alarm wakes you up in the middle of the night, you will know immediately what to do."

While you're away, don't leave valuable jewelry in a box on your dresser - or under the mattress, in a cookie jar, or in the freezer. Instead, put such items into a safety deposit box, concealed safe, or a locked, alarmed "safe room."

Soloway recommends investing in a table bolt for expensive stereos, computers, and VCRs. "If it's too difficult to steal, most thieves, looking to get in and out quickly, won't bother," he said.

* * *

The shift to 'smart home' systems

The newest trend in home security systems focuses not just on burglars, but on any emergency that can cause house damage while you're away.

For example, NAPCO Security Group makes "smart home" systems whose sensors detect not only intruders but also changes in air temperature, humidity, or carbon monoxide level that would precede a flood or other malfunction.

"We try to monitor any emergency, any abnormal condition," said Richard Soloway, chairman of the firm. "Our system will send a message to the central monitoring station before the pipes burst."

The product is available through Hidden Security in Ridgewood, Hawk Reliable in River Vale, Boss Security Systems in Leonia, and Charles Alarms in Closter.

John Thorsen of Connected Hearth, a new company in the Hamptons, is taking this sophistication a step further by using Internet-based monitoring and notification.

His system, which goes into testing next week before going national, uses equipment that can notify homeowners of problems via e-mail or pager instead of, or in addition to, a phone call.

Connected Hearth, which Thorsen developed primarily with second-home owners in mind, begins with the installation of a home-automation controller.

Its fire- and burglar-alarm component is basically the same as any other company's, optionally utilizing central station monitoring over a phone line, but homeowners get access to a Web portal through which they can check the security system from anywhere on earth. They also can choose to install cameras that pan rooms for a live view, or remotely adjust the thermostat and lighting.

"Subscribers can specify that our Web site notify them upon any change in the conditions that we monitor - unauthorized entry during day or evening or vacation (three different modes), fire, water leak, and temperature drop," Thorsen said.

Say you're sunning in Acapulco when a pipe bursts. No problem. The system will send a message you created beforehand to three friends or neighbors. Bob Smith next door might get an e-mail reading, for instance, "Bob, a water leak is detected at my home. We left the key with Marge. Please check it out. Thanks."

Another option on this system is a motion sensor built into the security camera to detect someone at the front door. In the blink of an eye, it takes a picture and e-mails it to subscribers.



"Suppose you're expecting a Fed Ex delivery," Thorsen said. "The driver arrives, the camera detects motion, takes a photo, e-mails it to you in seconds, and then you can buzz the delivery person into your foyer via the Internet. You can even have a display screen with a live message to the deliveryman. And if it's a burglar, you have a picture."

Connected Hearth subscribers will pay a basic monthly fee of \$59.95 (central station monitoring costs an additional \$29.95). Thorsen estimates that installation will cost an average of \$9,000. Each emergency event notification will result in a \$9.95 charge.

Check out the Web site, connectedhearth.com, for a live demo after July 1.

-Abigail Leichman

6395158

 [E-mail this story](#)  [Print this story](#)



Get 50% off *The Record* or *Herald News*
Click here to **subscribe today!**

Copyright © 2003 North Jersey Media Group Inc.

Copyright infringement notice