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Often, my clients will ask me if it's safe here in town. Naturally, they are concerned about their loved ones, their homes, their possessions which are valuable for monetary or sentimental reasons, and even because of property values. My answer is always, **"Anything can happen anywhere"**. I will then direct them to the local police station for specifics to further allay their concerns and get the most up-to-date specifics.

These days with information disseminated in moments, we are well aware that usually peaceful settings anywhere can be turned upside down in the blink of an eye. Recently, there have been some burglaries in the area. I'm sending this December 2016 article from Realtor Magazine by Tracey Hawkins which has great tips for your safety:

## 10 Anti-Burglary Tips for Your Home

- 1. Maintain your property.** Especially in the wintertime, many people stay indoors and neglect issues such as peeling trim or an overgrown yard. But if the home looks unkempt, thieves may think it's abandoned and, therefore, an easy target. Shoveling your walkways to clear them of snow and debris and removing holiday decorations and fallen tree branches in a timely manner will signal that the home is occupied.
- 2. Know your neighbors.** Many people don't really know their neighbors; it's more than just saying hi and being friendly. Invite them over to see your home before it goes on the market, and introduce them to the people they may see regularly stopping by during this time (especially your agent). Then they'll know who is and isn't supposed to be at your home and can better assess when there may be a threat while you're gone.
- 3. Assess your home's vulnerability.** Walk to the curb and face your house. Ask yourself, "How would I get in if I were locked out?" The first thing you think of, whether it's the window with a broken lock or the door that won't shut all the way, is exactly how a thief will get in. Think like a burglar, and then address the issues that come to mind.
- 4. Respect the power of lighting.** Criminals are cowards, and they don't want to be seen. The house that is well-lit at night provides a deterrent because thieves don't want the attention and the potential to be caught by witnesses. It's wise to invest in tools that make nighttime light automation easy. That includes dusk-to-dawn adapters that go into existing light fixtures and motion detectors. But beware of leaving your exterior lights on at all times, which signifies the occupant is gone for an extended period of time.
- 5. Use technology to make your home look occupied.** In addition to lighting, smart-home technology has made it easier to make it appear like people are home, even when they're not. Systems that remotely control lighting, music, and appliances such as a thermostat can help you achieve this. Though not considered smart-home tech, simple lamp timing devices available at hardware stores are also good for this purpose.
- 7. Yes, it has to be said: Lock your doors.** It's amazing how many people think they live in a safe-enough neighborhood not to have to lock their doors when they leave. Some facts sellers should know: In 30 percent of burglaries, the criminals access the home through an unlocked door or window; 34 percent of burglars use the front door to get inside; and 22 percent use the back door, according to the FBI Uniform Crime Report.
- 8. Reinforce your locks.** A good door lock is nothing without a solid frame. Invest in a solid door jam and strike plate first, and then invest in good locks. Know the difference between a single-cylinder and a double-cylinder deadbolt. Double-cylinder deadbolts are recommended because they require a key to get in and out. For safety and emergency escape purposes, you must leave the key in when you are home. But double-cylinder locks are against regulations in some places, so check with your local police department's crime prevention office.

### National Snapshot of Burglaries

A burglary is committed every 20 seconds, with nearly 1.6 million such crimes nationwide annually, according to the FBI's [2015 Crime in the United States](#) report. That's down 7.8 percent from 2014. Total property crime, which includes arson, larceny theft, and motor vehicle theft, reached nearly 8 million instances in 2015, down 2.6 percent from 2014.

8. **Blare the sirens.** Burglars are usually in and out in less than five minutes, and they know police can't respond to an alarm that quickly. Their bigger concern is witnesses to their crime. For that reason, an external siren is invaluable, whether as part of a monitored security system or a DIY alarm. Even if you don't have an alarm, it's not a bad idea to invest in fake security signs and post them near doors.
9. **Consider surveillance cameras.** The Los Angeles Police Department started a program encouraging homeowners to install a device called Ring, a doorbell with video surveillance capability that allows homeowners to view what's outside their door on their smartphone, in a neighborhood that was a target for burglaries. After Ring was installed in hundreds of homes, the burglary rate dropped by 55 percent, according to reports. **Most state and local regulations require posting a warning that people are being recorded.** (But again, this can be effective even if you don't actually have the cameras installed!)
10. **Mark your valuables and record details.** Use invisible-ink pens or engravers to mark identifying information (driver's license or state ID numbers) on items. Log serial numbers and take photos of your belongings. Check to see if your police department participates in the Operation Identification program. They will have stickers for you to place on doors or windows warning would-be thieves that your items are marked. These steps may prevent them from pawning or selling stolen items and can help you reclaim recovered belongings.

On the topic of safety and homes, smart-home devices can make your property more desirable. Here are excerpts from another Realtor Magazine article from September 2016 written by Graham Wood which you may find useful. He writes about Tara Christianson, technology and training director at Century 21 Redwood Realty in Arlington, Va., who offers tips on how smart devices can protect your property and yourself.

## The Safety Benefit of Smart Homes

- **Smart door locks** and keyless entry systems can help keep a vacant property more secure. Products such as [Schlage's Bluetooth-enabled locks](#) not only allow you to control access to the property but also can record traffic in the home. You can create e-keys for contractors, assistants, and your real estate agent.
- **Video doorbells**, such as [SkyBell](#), contain video cameras so you can talk to whoever is on the other side of the door without even being on the premises. The video streams to your phone, and some products even allow you to take a photo of the person at the door to send to authorities if you become alarmed.
- **Motion sensors** are helpful for both vacant homes and new construction — both properties squatters tend to target. [Fibaro](#), for example, sends activity alerts to your phone when there is movement in the home. You can set alerts to the times you expect the home to be empty. "Maybe someone's in the home that you need to be aware of so you know to bring someone with you when you arrive," Christianson says.
- Use devices that **monitor doors and windows** so you can tell when they've been left open. This will likewise alert you to suspicious activity at a home, and these devices are useful for sellers as well so they can monitor their homes on days when they're being shown.
- **Smart lighting and entertainment systems** don't just help you set the ambiance for a showing. Systems like [Hue](#) and [Lifx](#) allow you to set on and off times for lighting systems, making it look like a listing is continually occupied.



### Do Smart Homes Invite Threats?

Such technology can make a home more vulnerable to hackers, Christianson admits, but there are steps you can take to mitigate the risk. You should never use open Wi-Fi networks when operating smart devices. How protected is your network? Do you have a password that's hard to guess, or are you using a simple code like "123" or "password"?

Clients interested in smart devices should look toward well-known vendors such as [Nest](#), which is backed by Google. "Sometimes, products or companies sound great, but then the vendor stops updating their devices or shuts down without notice," Christianson says. "You don't want your client to be stuck with something that suddenly stops working."

If you are a seller, disclose what smart devices you have in your home to buyers up front. That will absolve you of any responsibility in case a buyer has a complaint about being monitored during a showing. "You don't want conversations with buyers caught on tape without their knowledge," Christianson says. Let informed buyers make their own decisions about whether they want to even enter rooms that have active recording devices.