

Taking A Vacation? Make Sure To Secure Your Home First

(NAPSA)—Four to five minutes—that could be the difference between whether or not your return home from vacation is ruined by a burglar.

According to experts, that's the maximum time most thieves will spend trying to break into a house before giving up in search of easier prey. That holds true year-round, whether you're blissfully off on a winter ski getaway or spending the summer on the beach.

"People don't realize that going on vacation can be an invitation for would-be thieves," says Mike Convery, vice president and chief claim officer at MetLife Auto & Home®. "Or that the average burglary will result in a loss of more than \$2,000."

In fact, the Insurance Information Institute indicates nine out of 10 break-ins could have been prevented if homeowners had burglar-proofed their properties. The simple act of locking your doors before leaving home can go a long way toward deterring a burglar. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, more than 50 percent of burglars use an unlocked door or window to gain access to a home.

How else can you avoid returning to a home that's been ransacked? Read on for some "Do's" and "Don'ts" from the experts:

DON'T advertise you're away. Arrange to have the lawn mowed, put lights and electronics on variable timers, and—to really complete the illusion—ask a neighbor to park a car in your driveway.

DO make would-be thieves feel both exposed and contained. Choose picket or chain-link fencing instead of solid fencing to create a physical barrier that's less easy to hide behind. Keep hedges clipped to around waist level.

DON'T hesitate to rearrange things. Those expensive belongings, including TVs and stereo systems, might as well



Burglars look for easy prey.

have a sign on them saying "Take Me" if they're left in plain view from windows and doors.

DO get an assist from technology. A solar-powered, motion-sensor light—which doesn't require an electrician to install—illuminates your property so that lurking intruders are easier for neighbors and passing patrol cars to spot.

DON'T hide keys in "secret places" outside your home. Most burglars know where to look. Better to leave a duplicate with someone you trust.

DO invest in a burglar alarm. The most effective ones notify an outside service of trouble, but any kind is a good deterrent. Just make sure there's a friend or family member available to turn it off if it's set off in your absence.

One last thing: "In addition to those preventive measures, all homeowners should complete a personal property inventory," says Convery. "That way, if you are burglarized, you'll already have a detailed list of your valuables for the authorities, which can be a difficult task after the fact."

You can get a free Personal Property Inventory brochure from MetLife Auto & Home by calling (800) 608-0190.