

National Association of REALTORS® Homeowner Safety & Security Toolkit

May 2015

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Overview

REALTORS® play varied and important roles in their respective communities. They are economic drivers, they help people fulfill their dreams and they make connections for home buyers and sellers, among other things. They also very much care about the experience clients have well after a home purchase or sale.

One important way the REALTOR® community can help homeowners have the best possible experience is to address safety and security best practices that are within their control. The Homeowner Safety & Security Toolkit is a guide for local NAR associations to share information on the following topics with REALTORS®, media and the community:

- Home security tips for new homeowners
- Homeowner crime prevention tips as weather gets warmer
- Homeowner crime prevention tips while on vacation

This outreach will help fulfil a core standard for local boards. A recommended partner in these efforts is your local police department. They have first-hand perspective on crime prevention best practices for homeowners, including chief considerations that may be unique to a geography or type of community. It makes sense that REALTORS® and local law enforcement serve as a dual community resource on homeowner safety and security.

How-to Guide

This toolkit provides your association with the context, materials and best practices to most effectively get the word out about homeowner safety and security. Following are some overarching recommendations to tell these important stories and most effectively deliver the content.

Engage local police

REALTORS® certainly are central go-to sources on many topics associated with homeownership. Police also lend critical perspective for homeowners, especially when the conversation turns to one of safety and security. Together REALTORS® and police make for a strong combined authority on this topic.

We recommend that your association engage directly with local police for them to provide input on your content and to partner as a direct source for the information you're citing. Depending on the size, protocols and approaches of your local police department, you can reach out directly to the superintendent of police, a police department community liaison, communications lead or otherwise to determine the best way to work with them.

Here are some ways we recommend you engage with your local police department:

- Review and add perspective to your content.
- Be a cited source for the content.
- Provide a quote for media materials from the highest ranking person in the department possible. (The more senior the official in the department, the more credibility the quote carries and the more appealing this can be for media consideration.)

Customize content

In the pages that follow, there are templates of sample content for homeowner tips on various safety and security topics. But these are just a starting point. When working with your local police department and adding your own local community research and insight, some key considerations for content customization might include:

- **Whether you are in a predominantly metropolitan, suburban or rural area...** There can be different home safety and security dynamics depending on the types of communities in your area. If you live in an area with a diversity of types of communities, you also could customize different types of content to reflect that.

- **Whether you have existing neighborhood watchdog or community policing efforts...** There might be existing programs, campaigns, missives or the like in your communities you would want to reference and draw upon when citing ways to help enhance the homeowner safety and security of neighbors. You may even want to approach a representative from these groups and ask for their input.
- **Whether there are civic services that would complement homeowners' efforts...** In addition to the local police department, other municipal services (i.e. building department) might have communications, efforts, training or otherwise to support homeowners in their safety and security efforts.
- **Whether there are condo or sub-division associations who might factor into guidance...** In addition to individual homeowners, there may be associations (e.g. HOAs) affiliated with and overseeing groups of homeowners who set regulations or manage areas that affect the safety and security of all.
- **Whether you want to endorse certain providers of safety- and security-related products and services...** You may already or decide as a local association that you want to give a seal of approval to certain businesses such as security system, locksmith and window replacement services and recommend them to homeowners.

Pitch media uniquely

In addition to the broader guidelines provided here and templates that follow, take into account unique ways to deliver content and engage with media in your area on these topics.

- **Create bite-size content bits.** In addition to sharing the full press release treatments, pitch approaches or offer content to media in the form of visuals and extracted facts such as graphics, infographics, breakout boxes and pictures with captions. The tips and lists nature of the homeowner safety and security content lends itself to these approaches.
- **Tie to calendar events.** National Safety Month in June by the National Safety Council and Crime Prevention Month in October by the National Crime Prevention Council are examples of natural ties to the topic of homeowner safety and security. Radio and online print publications are among the media most interested in this type of “calendar” content.
- **Emphasize public service education.** The kinds of homeowner safety and security tips you’re developing and providing really lend themselves to treatments such as matte releases, Public Service Announcements and the like. Consider ways you can increase exposure to this content by sharing it through these kinds of public education-oriented channels.
- **Use discretion based on current events.** While the partnership with police on the topic of homeowner safety and security is a natural one given the role they play, consider whether recent events in your area would in any way change your strategy on how you work with police on this effort.

Leverage content

In addition to the earned and owned media you conduct and activate, consider other ways you can make this content work even more for you and your members.

- **Develop designed tips fact sheets.** You can easily replicate the content started here that you customize and pass it on in the form of information sheets for REALTORS® to share directly with home buying clients.
- **Engage on social media.** Post content on your Twitter feed, on LinkedIn, your Facebook page and via other social media platforms to cross-promote among media and consumers the home security and safety stories you're trying to tell.
- **Post and cross-link the content.** For instance, coordinate links between your local police department website(s) and your association website. Consider also local neighborhood and community service oriented groups who might welcome this kind of content for their audiences on their websites such as local chapters of the National Neighborhood Watch Association.
- **Cite related topics and resources for your members.** As you share homeowner safety and security information, you also can reference complementary content from the REALTOR® Safety Program such as:
 - REALTOR® Safety Webinar: Safety Tips to Share with Sellers:
<http://www.learninglibrary.com/AspDotNetStoreFront70/p-2496-realtor-safety-webinar-safety-tips-to-share-with-sellers.aspx>
 - “Safety Tips to Share With Sellers” article:
<http://www.realtor.org/topics/realtor-safety/safety-tips-to-share-with-sellers>
 - “The Safety Talk You Need to Have With Clients” article:
<http://realtormag.realtor.org/sales-and-marketing/feature/article/2014/09/safety-talk-you-need-have-clients>

Proactive Key Messages

Following are the recommended topline key messages associated with REALTOR® education regarding homeowner safety and security.

Homeowners can actively work to get ahead of crime.		
1. Situation	2. Response	3. Call to Action
About 28 of every 1,000 homes get burglarized each year, costing an average \$2,322 per completed burglary.	Local REALTORS® and police are partnering to determine what homeowners can do to get ahead of crime.	As a homeowner there are specific, preventative steps you can take to lessen the chance of falling victim to crime.

1. Situation

- a. In 2011, the rate of household burglary was 27.6 victimizations per 1,000 households, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).
- b. Property crimes increase by 11 percent during the summer months. [U.S. Department of Justice, 2014]
- c. Almost three out of four burglaries occur at a residential property, according to FBI Crime in the U.S., 2013. Also:
 - i. Burglaries of residential properties accounted for 74 percent of all burglary offenses.
 - ii. The average loss per burglary is \$2,322.
 - iii. A burglary occurs every 16.4 seconds in the United States resulting in approximately \$4.5 billion in property loss.
 - iv. Burglaries and theft account for more than 90 percent of all property crimes.
 1. Of all property crimes in 2013, larceny-theft accounted for 69.6 percent.
 2. Burglary accounted for 22.3 percent and motor vehicle theft for 8.1 percent.

2. Response

- a. Local REALTORS® and police are partnering to determine what homeowners can do to get ahead of crime.
- b. Together they uniquely lend insight regarding safety and security given their extensive experience with homeowners broadly and with homeowners who share experiences when they've become a victim of crime.
- c. Key areas of focus include:
 - i. Home security tips for new homeowners
 - ii. Homeowner crime prevention tips as weather gets warmer
 - iii. Homeowner crime prevention tips while on vacation

3. Call to Action

- a. No matter where you live, as a homeowner there are specific, preventative steps you can take to lessen the chance of falling victim to crime.
- b. Pay close attention to the tips being offered by local police and REALTORS® to take action and have greater awareness as a homeowner.
- c. These steps include everything from lighting, locks and lawns to how you work with neighbors, home service providers and local police.

Reactive Q&A

Generally speaking, we consider the content associated with the homeowner safety and security topics to be straightforward and non-controversial. However with the recent spotlight on police departments across the United States, we're sensitive to how even very well-intended topics could possibly get drawn into other conversations taking place.

With that in mind, consider the following types of media or community questions and answers and how you might customize this to your local area. These are intended for reaction only should you – however unlikely – be asked these types of questions.

1. **Why did you decide to embark on a homeowner safety and security education effort?** We want homeowners to have the best possible experience they can and that extends beyond the purchase of their home. This is a naturally related area to what we do as REALTORS® and a way we help provide a public service.
2. **Why now?** Safety has been a running theme in other areas of our work as REALTORS®. The topic of homeowner safety and security is a natural extension of that.
3. **Why did you decide to partner with the local police on this?** Police have first-hand knowledge of crimes homeowners face. That kind of intelligence – including seeing the kinds and frequency of different types of crimes in and around homes – is incredibly helpful to identify potential preventative action.
4. **Are you endorsing the local police department by having them participate in this effort?** We recognize that police are the most likely to be called in the event of a crime involving a homeowner. We wanted to tap into that knowledge.
5. **Have you partnered with the local police department before? If so, how?** [add local context]
6. **Are there unique considerations for homeowner safety and security in predominantly low-income and/or racial minority neighborhoods?** Our tips take into account aspects such as whether homeowners are in predominantly metropolitan or more rural areas, for instance, versus dynamics specific to discreet neighborhoods within those settings.
7. **Are you planning to address what to do as a homeowner if someone burglarizes your home while you are there?** No. Our focus is on homeowner security and safety prevention rather than how to behave while a crime is being committed.
8. **What about safety for people who can't afford a home but have the same or greater concerns?** Many of the same tips and guidance we're providing very much apply to people living in various forms of residence, whether owned or not.

News Release Template: New Homeowner

Home Sweet Home: Safety Tips for New Homeowners

[Location (date)] – Home security can often be overlooked in favor of more pressing issues for new homeowners. While fire alarms and working locks may be top of mind, there are other aspects of home security that can go unnoticed but are just as critical.

“New homeowners will address safety issues during the home inspection process, but home security goes far beyond that,” **[local association spokesperson]** said. “Home security helps homeowners settle into their new residence more safely, so the sooner measures are put in place the better.”

About three out of every four burglaries occur at a residential property, according to the FBI [Crime in the U.S., 2013]. The average home burglary results in a \$2,322 loss.

“Burglary is one of the most common household property crimes, and it’s also one of the easiest to prevent,” **[local police representative]** said. “Homeowners can only benefit from taking appropriate home security precautions.”

The **[name of association]** worked with the **[local police department]** to compile the following list of home security tips for new homeowners:

- **Maintain your yard.** Well-groomed landscaping is an important aspect of home security. By keeping your shrubbery trimmed, criminals are unable to hide behind them.
- **Install outdoor lighting.** A well-lit exterior discourages criminals from hiding in your landscaping, and makes your home less approachable. Lights with motion sensors are also a good idea.
- **Update door and lock hardware.** It’s always a good idea to replace your locks and make sure that all easily accessible entry points are secure when you move into a new home. This also includes evaluating window security and installing additional security measures if needed.
- **Meet your neighbors.** The more friendly eyes watching out for your property the better. By introducing yourself to your neighbors, you’ll both be more comfortable alerting each other if something appears different.
- **Consider installing an alarm system.** Security systems are a major deterrent for criminals, but they don’t need to be expensive to be effective. An alarm system could easily be worth the cost and peace of mind it provides.
- **Check batteries in fire and carbon monoxide detectors.** In addition to taking preventative measures against burglary, another critical safety measure within your control is to protect your home from fire and carbon monoxide poisoning.

For more information, **[direct readers to your association's website or where they can find more information]**.

[Insert organization's boiler plate]

###

News Release Template: Summer Security

Protect Your Home from Increased Crime During Summer Months

[Location (date)] – While the summer months are often characterized by warmer weather and the smell of sunscreen, they're also the peak season for burglaries.

"There's an uptick in crime rates during the summer months, but many people don't think it will happen to them," **[local police representative]** said. "Burglary and theft are two of the most common household property crimes, and they're also the easiest to prevent."

According to the Department of Justice and the FBI, property crimes are 11 percent more common during the summer months and almost three out of four burglaries occur at a residential property. The average loss per burglary is \$2,322.

"Small actions make a big difference when it comes to preventing a burglary," **[local association spokesperson]** said. "It's important that homeowners are aware of actions they can take to protect themselves and their property."

The **[name of association]** and the **[local police department]** compiled the following list of tips to help homeowners protect their property and themselves during the summer months:

- **Lock doors and windows.** Open doors and windows are one of the most common points of entry for a criminal looking to break into a residence. It's important to keep doors and windows locked at all times, even when you are outside working in the yard.
- **Use specialty locks.** Not only should doors and windows be locked at all times, but homeowners should make sure the locks they're using are a bit more complicated than the average lock. On average, burglars will spend less than a minute trying to break into a home, so using a lock that will frustrate thieves is an easy way to prevent a break-in.
- **Lock and label large items.** It's important to protect all personal property, including larger items that you store in a garage or outside. Lock larger items such as lawn mowers, bikes, grills, etc. and engrave them with your initials so that you can identify your property in case it is stolen.
- **Light things up.** Outdoor lights are a great deterrent to criminals who don't want to be seen. Focus especially on the rear and sides of your home.
- **Be aware of neighborhood activity.** You know your neighborhood better than most, so be a good neighborhood watchdog, and alert police to unusual activity.

- **Protect yourself.** Not only do you have to worry about your property, but you also have to worry about protecting yourself. Beware of con artists running home improvement scams and deception burglaries, and be sure not to leave personal information lying around.

For more information, **[direct readers to your association’s website or where they can find more information]**.

[Insert organization’s boiler plate]

###

News Release Template: Vacation Security

Prepare for Vacation with Home Safety Checklist

[Location (date)] – Vacations require a certain amount of planning and preparation, but one element that is often overlooked is home safety.

“Just like you create a packing list, homeowners should have a home safety checklist that they follow before going on vacation,” **[local association spokesperson]** said. “It’s well worth homeowners’ time to prepare for vacation rather than deal with the consequences of a burglary when they come home.”

A burglary occurs every 16.4 seconds in the United States, resulting in approximately \$4.5 billion in property loss, according to the FBI. The average loss per burglary is \$2,322 for individual homeowners.

“Criminals are always looking for easy targets,” **[local police representative]** said. “They look for signs like piles of mail or newspapers, garbage cans left at the end of the driveway or an uncut lawn, and will try to take advantage of your absence.”

To help you prepare for vacation and keep your mind at ease, the **[name of association]** and **[local police department]** created the following checklist to help you prevent a burglary while you’re away:

- **Lock doors and windows.** There’s nothing worse than wondering if you remembered to lock the door or close that first floor window. Unlocked doors and windows are a criminal’s main point of entry. This is also a good time to replace any broken locks and make sure all of your locks are working properly.
- **Make the residence look occupied.** Try to make things look as normal as possible while you’re gone. Keep your blinds in their normal position, leave the air conditioning/heat on while you’re gone, hire someone to mow your lawn, ask neighbors to park in your driveway, place a hold on mail/deliveries, etc.
- **Use timers.** Placing lights, TVs, radios, etc. to turn on and off at normal times is an easy way to make it seem like someone is home. Nothing says you’re away like a dark house multiple nights in a row.
- **Beware of social media.** Be careful of what you post and share online. By sharing your vacation pictures and travel plans online, you’re advertising that your residence is unattended. If you have a landline, leave a normal message on your answering machine, and don’t share that you’re out of town.
- **Tell select people that you’ll be away.** Ask neighbors to keep an eye on your property, and leave a phone number where you can be reached in case of

emergency. Notify police if you'll be gone longer than a week and consider asking a friend or neighbor to check in on things while you're away.

- **Remove your spare key.** If you keep a spare key hidden outside of your residence, either take it with you or leave it with a neighbor. A criminal will often check for a spare key if they're trying to enter your home.

For more information, **[direct readers to your association's website or where they can find more information]**.

[Insert organization's boiler plate]

###

Blog Post Template: New Homeowner

There's No Place Like Home: Security Tips for New Homeowners

Nothing compares to the feeling of being settled in a new home, so home security can be often overlooked in favor of more pressing issues for new homeowners. While major safety issues such as fire alarms and working locks are top of mind, other aspects of home security can fall by the wayside and go unattended for long periods of time.

Burglary and theft are two of the most common household property crimes and approximately 3 out of every 4 burglaries occur at a residential property. There are many precautions homeowners can take to limit the chance of a burglary or theft that should be addressed soon after moving into a new home.

The **[name of association]** worked with the **[local police department]** to assemble the following list of home security tips for new homeowners:

- **Maintain your yard.** Well-groomed landscaping is an important aspect of home security. By keeping your shrubbery trimmed, criminals are unable to hide behind them.
- **Install outdoor lighting.** A well-lit exterior discourages criminals from hiding in your landscaping, and makes your home less approachable. Lights with motion sensors are also a good idea.
- **Update door and lock hardware.** It's always a good idea to replace your locks and make sure that all easily accessible entry points are secure when you move into a new home. This also includes evaluating window security and installing additional security measures if needed.
- **Meet your neighbors.** The more friendly eyes watching out for your property the better. By introducing yourself to your neighbors, you'll both be more comfortable alerting each other if something appears different.
- **Consider installing an alarm system.** Security systems are a major deterrent for criminals, but they don't need to be expensive to be effective. The average burglary results in a \$2,322 loss [FBI Crime in U.S., 2013], so an alarm system could easily be worth the cost and peace of mind it provides.
- **Check batteries in fire and carbon monoxide detectors.** In addition to taking preventative measures against burglary, another critical safety measure within your control is to protect your home from fire and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Blog Post Template: Summer Security

Sun, Sand, Safety: Protect Your Home from Burglaries, Theft This Summer

Summertime is almost here bringing warm weather and carefree days, but summer also brings an uptick in crime rates across the country.

Property crimes increase by 11 percent during the summer months with burglaries and theft accounting for more than 90 percent of all those crimes. Small actions make a big difference when it comes to preventing a burglary, so it's important that homeowners are aware of actions they can take to protect themselves and their property.

The **[name of association]** and the **[local police department]** compiled this list of tips to help homeowners protect their homes during the summer months and throughout the rest of the year:

- **Lock doors and windows.** Open doors and windows are one of the most common points of entry for a criminal looking to break into a residence. It's important to keep doors and windows locked at all times, even when you are outside working in the yard.
- **Use specialty locks.** Not only should doors and windows be locked at all times, but homeowners should make sure the locks they're using are a bit more complicated than the average lock. On average, burglars will spend less than a minute trying to break into a home, so using a lock that will frustrate thieves is an easy way to prevent a break-in.
- **Lock and label large items.** It's important to protect all personal property, including larger items that you store in a garage or outside. Lock larger items such as lawn mowers, bikes, grills, etc. and engrave them with your initials so that you can identify your property in case it is stolen.
- **Light things up.** Outdoor lights are a great deterrent to criminals who don't want to be seen. Focus especially on the rear and sides of your home.
- **Be aware of neighborhood activity.** You know your neighborhood better than most, so be a good neighborhood watchdog, and alert police to unusual activity.
- **Protect yourself.** Not only do you have to worry about your property, but you also have to worry about protecting yourself. Beware of con artists running home improvement scams and deception burglaries, and be sure not to leave personal information lying around.

Blog Post Template: Vacation Security

Your Vacation Checklist: Make Sure Your Home is Secure While You're Gone

Your bags are packed and you're about to head out the door for a week-long vacation, but you can't help but feel like you're forgetting something. Preparing your home for your departure is just as important as remembering to pack your toothbrush.

Just like you create a packing list, homeowners should have a home safety checklist they follow before leaving their home for any extended period of time. According to the FBI, a burglary occurs every 16.4 seconds in the United States resulting in approximately \$4.5 billion in property loss.

The **[name of association]** and **[local police department]** created the checklist below to keep your mind at ease and avoid that sinking feeling in your stomach when you're not sure you remembered to lock the deadbolt:

- **Lock doors and windows.** There's nothing worse than wondering if you remembered to lock the door or close that first floor window. Unlocked doors and windows are a criminal's main point of entry. This is also a good time to replace any broken locks and make sure all of your locks are working properly.
- **Make the residence look occupied.** Try to make things look as normal as possible while you're gone. Keep your blinds in their normal position, leave the air conditioning/heat on while you're gone, hire someone to mow your lawn, ask neighbors to park in your driveway, place a hold on mail/deliveries, etc.
- **Use timers.** Placing lights, TVs, radios, etc. to turn on and off at normal times is an easy way to make it seem like someone is home. Nothing says you're away like a dark house multiple nights in a row.
- **Beware of social media.** Be careful of what you post and share online. By sharing your vacation pictures and travel plans online, you're advertising that your residence is unattended. If you have a landline, leave a normal message on your answering machine, and don't share that you're out of town.
- **Tell select people that you'll be away.** Ask neighbors to keep an eye on your property, and leave a phone number where you can be reached in case of emergency. Notify police if you'll be gone longer than a week and consider asking a friend or neighbor to check in on things while you're away.
- **Remove your spare key.** If you keep a spare key hidden outside of your residence, either take it with you or leave it with a neighbor. A criminal will often check for a spare key if they're trying to enter your home.

Sample Social Media Content

Twitter

- **New Homeowners**
 - You've bought a new home, now what? Home security should be a top priority. Check out tips at [\[link\]](#) to help you settle in!
 - Average burglary results in a \$2,322 loss. [\[local association\]](#) and [\[local police department\]](#) offer security tips for new homeowners
 - When was the last time you checked the batteries in your smoke detector? Go to [\[link\]](#) for new homeowner tips; reminders for all!
 - How secure is your home? Check out [\[link\]](#) to help you figure it out
 - Don't let criminals hide behind your shrubs! A well-trimmed shrub helps prevent crime and makes your home more secure.

- **Summer Safety**
 - Property crimes increase by 11% during the summer. See warm weather tips for homeowners to help protect their property at [\[link\]](#)
 - 3 out of 4 burglaries occur at a residential property. Protect your home from burglars during warmer months with tips from [\[local association\]](#)
 - [\[local association\]](#) and [\[local police department\]](#) work to share tips to protect homeowners from burglaries this summer
 - Lock doors even when you're at home to help prevent burglaries during the summer. Check out more summer safety tips at [\[link\]](#)
 - Protect more than your skin this summer with home safety tips at [\[link\]](#)!

- **Vacation**
 - Make sure your home doesn't get targeted while you're on vacation with these tips from [\[local association\]](#) and [\[local police department\]](#)!
 - Pile of papers on the doorstep? Place a hold on your paper delivery while on vacation to make it appear that you're home.
 - Notify [\[local police department\]](#) if you're going to be out of town more than a week. Check out more tips at [\[link\]](#)
 - Should you close your blinds or keep them open when you go on vacation? [\[local association\]](#) and [\[local police department\]](#) answer.
 - What can you do to prevent a burglary while on vacation? Get the answers at [\[link\]](#)!

Facebook/LinkedIn

- You've completed the home inspection, but your duties as a new homeowner don't stop there. Home security is much more than having a solid foundation and working smoke detectors. Making sure that your exterior is well lit and that you have a well-manicured lawn can go far toward contributing to your piece of mind. For more things to consider, check out the list from the **[local association]** and the **[local police department]**!
- Don't let yourself fall victim to a burglary or theft! Property crimes increase by 11% during the summer months and the National Association of REALTORS® is here to help. **[Local association]** and the **[local police department]** partnered to create some guidelines to protect homeowners from property crimes this summer.
- Did you remember to lock the deadbolt on your way to the airport? Incorporating elements of home safety into your pre-vacation routine may save you a headache in the long run. Follow these tips from the **[local association]** and the **[local police department]** to keep your mind at ease while soaking up the sun on vacation.

Member Email Template

Dear **[Member]**,

As announced at the 2015 REALTORS® Legislative Meetings & Trade Expo, the National Association of REALTORS® is providing guidance on how community REALTORS® and police can partner to guide homeowners on what they can do to get ahead of crime.

The Homeowner Safety & Security Toolkit provides local associations with the context, materials and best practices to most effectively get the word out about homeowner safety and security on topics such as:

- Home security tips for new homeowners
- Homeowner crime prevention tips as weather gets warmer
- Homeowner crime prevention tips while on vacation

Working with local police in the **[geography]** area, we have customized this content that we are sharing with media and at our website at **[website]**. You also can use this information directly with your clients by sharing facts sheets and other tips found at **[attached, online, etc. at ___]**.

If you have any questions, please contact **[staff name and contact information]**.

Thank you,

[Name, Title]