

The Wisconsin Insurance Alliance

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PROTECT YOUR HOME AND YOUR IDENTITY, WARNS THE WIA

Home Burglaries Spike In Summer Months As More People Head Out For Vacation
New York, Tuesday, August 08, 2006 – Burglars who break into your home this summer could steal more than your jewelry and electronic equipment—they may also be after your identity.

When you leave on vacation, protect yourself against a physical or a virtual break-in, warns the Wisconsin Insurance Alliance (WIA).

More burglaries occur in July and August than in any other month of the year; losses due to burglaries totaled 3.5 billion in 2004, with residential burglaries averaging \$1,642 according to the FBI.

"Once in your home, a burglar can easily obtain credit card information, social security numbers or other identification information by going over personal documents in a home or stealing the family computer," says Eric Englund, president and spokesperson for the WIA.

Identity theft is one of the most widespread white collar crimes in the country, according to the Better Business Bureau, with around 8.9 million victims last year. The average loss in identity fraud cases is over \$6,000. However, if the fraud involves a credit card, victims are generally only liable for the first \$50 dollars for each card.

Insurance is available for identity theft, providing reimbursement to victims for the cost of restoring their identity and repairing credit reports. Some companies include it as part of their homeowners insurance policy. Others sell it as a stand alone policy or as an endorsement to a homeowners or renters insurance policy. On average, these policies cost between \$25 and \$50 for \$15,000 to \$25,000 worth of coverage. Identity theft insurance provides reimbursement for expenses such as phone bills, lost wages, notary and certified mailing costs and sometimes attorney fees with the prior consent of the insurer. Some companies offer resolution or restoration services that will guide you through the process of recovering your identity.

Standard homeowners insurance policies provide coverage for theft of personal possessions and damage to the home caused by the break-in. With replacement cost coverage, which is only about 10 percent more than actual cash value coverage, damaged property is replaced without a deduction for depreciation.

Regardless of how much insurance coverage you have, it is, of course, better to avoid getting burglarized altogether. The WIA recommends you follow these preventive measures to keep your home safe:

- Keep your home well lit. Mount exterior lights out of reach of would-be burglars in your yard or on your house. Put indoor lights on a timer.
- Make it time-consuming to break into your home. Dead-bolt window and door locks can slow a burglar down. You may also obtain a discount of two to five percent on your insurance policy for installing these devices.
- Make sure you have strong doors. Outside doors and frames should be made of metal or solid hardwood and be at least 1¾-inches thick and each door must fit its frame securely. The best lock will not deter a burglar if it is installed in a weak door. Garage doors also need strong locks. If you have a tool shed, keep it locked since burglars can use the tools and break into your home.
- Make it noisy to break into your home. Invest in a burglar alarm. The most effective systems ring at an outside service, which alerts the police, fire or other emergency service. A sophisticated alarm system could result in insurance discounts of 15 to 20 percent.
- Turn off your computer and disconnect it from the Internet. If you save personal information in your computer, make sure it is difficult to access. You don't want a hacker at work while you are on vacation.
- Keep valuables under lock and key and well hidden. When possible, do not leave personal documents in your home office or desk as burglars will know to look for them there. Put critical documents in a lock box somewhere else in the house. And, keep copies of important documents at another location — a relative's home, for example. Expensive jewelry should also be hidden in another room besides the bedroom or in a safety deposit box at the bank.

As you prepare to leave on vacation follow these additional steps:

- Have mail and packages picked up, forwarded or held by the post office. Stop newspaper deliveries and ask a neighbor to pick-up "throw-away" circulars.
- Leave blinds or curtains open in their usual position to make it appear that you are at home.
- Ask a neighbor you trust to keep an eye on your home while you are away. Make arrangements for your lawn to be mowed. Only tell people you know and trust that you are going away.