

SMARTdaily

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Making life better

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How safe is my place?

HOW TO RAMP UP SECURITY IN YOUR HOME WITHOUT IT COSTING A FORTUNE

SAFETY

JOANNA HALL

Australia has a troubling record for burglaries. According to a Budget Direct survey last year, we had the seventh highest rate of burglaries in the world in 12 months to April 2021, with 4.3 per cent of households experiencing at least one break-in or attempted break-in.

In Victoria alone a home is burgled every 20 minutes, prompting the RACV and Neighbourhood Watch to join forces and develop the How Safe Is My Place (howsafeismyplace.com.au) app. Designed to take the guesswork out of home security, it asks a series of questions and from your answers it can determine if you need to beef-up security.

Bambi Gordon, CEO of Neighbourhood Watch, says residential burglary was lower in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. "With so many people at home, thieves didn't want to risk being spotted or caught, and would deliberately avoid occupied houses," Gordon says.

"Now that we are returning to normal it's anticipated that crime will again increase."

Gordon says homeowners make common mistakes increasing the risk of a break-in.

"The biggest one is failing to keep the house locked, including when you're home," she says.

"Seven out of 10 cars stolen in Victoria are stolen with the owner's keys. If you lock your front door when you return home, and keep your keys out of sight, it could prevent a lot of cars from disappearing."

TAKE THE TEST

The five minutes it takes to do the RACV test can reveal a range of modern and easy ways to keep your house and loved ones safe.

- **Doors:** External doors with at least three steel inside resting hinges are harder to force open and security doors should ideally have a steel



Kealey Carew and Aiden Lindsay, with dog Frank, have upped their security with a door camera connected to their smartphone.

Three steps to take now

1 Remove hiding spots

Cut back trees and bushes that hide your front entry from the street. Stand on the footpath or road in front of your house and make sure you can see the front door, windows and entry clearly.

2 Leave a light on

The last thing a burglar wants is attention, so having motion-activated lights above your

front, back and side doors and in your driveway or backyard may be enough to make them leave.

3 Watch out for each other

Befriend your neighbours: they can report suspicious activity at your home and keep an eye on your place when you're away; and you can do the same for them.

Source: RACV's howsafeismyplace.com.au

frame and grille, reinforced corners and a deep receiver channel. Deadbolts and three-point locks are better than snib locks.

- **Windows:** Close and lock windows when you leave home and draw blinds to keep away curious eyes.

Consider installing grilles, external shutters or security glass. Even a Neighbourhood Watch sticker on the front window can be a deterrent (email admin@nhw.com.au).

- **Fences:** A low, see-through front fence makes it easier for neighbours

and passers-by to see potential intruders. At the rear, a fence at least 1.8m high with vertical posts or palings can be harder for a thief to climb, even more so if it has sharp points or a thorny climbing plant.

TECH TRICKS

In April, a report published by the smart-home security brand Ring revealed we're in the middle of a home security boom.

Mark Fletcher, managing director of Ring APAC, says there are plenty of security devices to consider that won't break the bank.

"The Ring Video Doorbell is ideal for anyone dipping their toes into smart home security," he says. "It allows you to answer your doorbell when you're away from home, and has extra features like motion alerts, to let you know when someone's approaching your door."

Other useful devices to consider

include Alexa-friendly security systems that can arm or disarm your security alarm, and pet cameras such as the Tech4Pets Smart Pet Feeder, which has a live camera and two-way communication.

Kealey Carew and Aiden Lindsay have been living in a Melbourne townhouse for the past two years.

"When we moved in we did the usual things like change the locks on the doors," says Carew, 30. "But when we got our miniature dachshund Frank last year, we overhauled our security again. Aiden and I both work, so we wanted to have extra surveillance for when we left Frank at home during the day."

The couple are expecting their first child in June and have installed a Ring door camera connected to Kealey's smartphone.

"Now we're having children, it's good to know that we have an added layer of protection," she says.

