

Before You Travel Checklist

Getting everyone in the car and on the road when it's time for a family trip is hectic and nerve-wracking enough, without having to worry about what you've forgotten to do. Here's a handy checklist to help you remember what to take care of when closing up your house in preparation for a trip. It can make all the difference to your peace of mind.

Service Arrangements

At least one week in advance of your departure, you should be sure to cancel some services to your home and arrange for others.

- Cancel newspaper delivery.
- Put mail delivery on hold (www.usps.gov), or ask a neighbor to collect it for you.
- Find a caretaker for pets and plants you're leaving behind.
- Make arrangements with house- and grounds-keeping help for service while you're away.
- Keep the lawn maintained and arrange for snow removal while you're gone – a driveway full of snow is a sure sign that no one is home.

Valuable Protection

Keep your valuable things in, and unwanted visitors out. Take that extra step to protect your belongings by dissuading burglars with some simple tricks.

- Lock up any important valuables off premises – such as in a safe deposit box.
- Lock all windows and doors.
- Set your alarm system if you have one.
- Leave a car parked in the driveway, or arrange for a neighbor to park there.
- Set light timers and leave an outside light on (consider installing one that comes on at dusk and goes off at dawn), so that the house appears to be occupied.
- Set an answering machine, or turn off the ringers on phones.
- For extra security, set a radio on a timer, so it sounds like someone's home.
- Let the police know if you will be gone for an extended period of time.

Energy Conservation

There's no reason for your house to use resources while you're away. Take steps to save energy while you're on a vacation.

- Turn the water heater down to a lower setting.
- Except for the radio and lights on timers, unplug electronics and appliances – they use power even when they're turned off, and you never know when a power surge might strike.

Accident Prevention

Keep some peace of mind while you're away by preventing accidents and breakdowns during your absence.

- If extreme temperatures are expected, have someone start any cars you've left behind, at least once a week.
- Leave the heat on at no less than 60 degrees, so the pipes won't freeze and burst.
- Leave cabinet doors open to help prevent frozen pipes. Pipes inside or behind cabinets are closed off from the heat, and are often the first to burst.
- Turn off the water to the washing machine so its hoses don't freeze and break.
- Leave a key with a trustworthy friend or neighbor and ask him to keep an eye on the house – leave a phone number where you can be reached.

Pleasant Homecoming

Coming back from a long journey should be pleasant experience, not a hassle. If you take care of your chores before you leave, you'll be much happier when you get back.

- Pay bills before you leave, so they're not waiting for you – with late charges!
- Clean out the refrigerator – don't leave anything that will go bad.
- Empty the trash right before you leave.
- Clean the house so that coming home is enjoyable.