

## 7 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR HOME MORE SECURE

According to Statistics Canada, there were 969,630 incidents of break and enter and theft in 2001. Of that number, 21,135 cases involved theft over \$5,000. People lose more than possessions in a property crime: they lose peace of mind.

What can you do to keep from becoming a victim? Police officers from across Canada agree that there are several things that you can do to help minimize your risk to burglary.

### **Excess Shrubbery**

Remove excess shrubbery around first floor windows and doorways. Giving better visibility to the street and adjoining neighbours. If you prefer your privacy and the greenery consider using "protective shrubbery". What burglar would risk tangling with a thorny bush to get at a window.

### **Lighting**

Lighting is an excellent way to discourage burglars. Think about installing exterior lighting out of a thief's reach. Motion sensor lights are one of the best options. An unexpected beam of light can startle a burglar who prefers to work in the shadows. These lights also save electricity because much of the time they are turned off. In addition to motion sensor lights at strategic locations around your property, it is wise to keep a few additional lights turn on all night.

Indoor lights set on automatic timers can also be another effective deterrent. You can set timers to turn lights on at dusk and off at dawn. Remember any light is better than no light so work with what you have if you don't wish to go to the extra expense.

### **Windows**

An open or insecure window is an inviting point of entry. Those flimsy twist latches mounted with short screws can be opened with one twist of a burglar's knife. A better approach for sliding doors and windows is to pin two parts of the window together. Close the window and drill holes through the frames where they overlap, one on each side. Then slide long nails in each hole, securing the window

shut. To open it, just pull the nails partway out.

If you have crank-out casement windows, experts say are usually adequate. As an added precaution, simply remove the crank handle. Jalousie, or louvered, windows, made from slatted panes are the least secure and should be replaced or barred. Windows can be made less accessible by moving common items that can be used to climb in – ladders, trashcans and sheds under first floor windows. Also remember to add security bars to fortify any basement windows you may have.

If you choose to implement any of the preceding security measures such as bars, nails or removing crank handles, be sure that every member of your family knows how to open the window. Police recommend security bars that open with a key from the inside. Keep the crank handle near the window at all times. In case of a fire, you must be able to thwart your security measures in a matter of seconds in order to escape to safety

## **Doors**

In many homes, the most serious home security weakness is doors. A thief's job is made simpler by poor locks, breakable doors or both. Doors containing a small window or windows are the most exposed. Thieves only need to break the glass, reach inside and unlock the door.

Experts recommend installing a double-cylinder lock that takes keys on both sides. Keep the indoor key out of sight and out of reach of potential thieves but be sure all family members know where it is so they can get out in case of fire. Some local fire codes ban double-cylinder locks check before installing one. For even greater security, consider the new safety glass designed for windowed doors. For sliding doors experts recommend securing the stationary side with manufacturer's pins these are often overlooked by installers. Then insert a folding "Charlie bar" or a dowel onto the track. Some break-ins occur when a thief removes a sliding door, try and fit your pinkie between the top of the door and the upper track. That big a gap means a burglar could lift the door up and pull it out. The solution: Open the door and set two extra screws in the top track so that the heads protrude enough to fill the gap. Even a solid wood or steel door needs a good dead-bolt lock; experts say burglars can get through spring-loaded, push

button locks with a credit card in about three seconds. Your safety also depends on how securely the door is seated in its frame. The key to that is a steel reinforced strike plate – the metal on the side of your doorframe that holds the bolt in place. You can buy a beefed up security-grade strike plate, but as long as the bolt enters the house frame by at least 3 1/2 centimetres, you may not need one. Instead, remove all the screws in your existing strike plate and replace them with seven centimetre screws that will penetrate the two by four house frame alongside the jamb. This will keep the lock in place and help prevent the whole doorframe from being torn away.

### **Garage Doors**

Always keep garage doors locked. The garage door can be the home's most vulnerable entry point. Have you recoded your automatic garage-door openers since they were installed? Most homeowners have never heard of recoding. The remote signal that opens older garage doors is based on a generic factory setting. It will open any door with the same code. Thieves with stolen remotes or remotes that they have purchased at a home supply store cruise neighbourhoods, randomly clicking on houses until a garage door opens. If you're going away for an extended period of time consider unplugging the motor that opens the garage door and put a padlock on the track.

### **Security Systems**

A security system should not be the only precaution you take to protect your home. It takes burglars an average of 60 seconds to break into a home and less than 10 minutes to rob it. But suburban police officers often average 15 minutes to respond to an alarm, and city response time may be much higher. Many automated calls are false alarms and police who can spend up to 50 per cent of their time dealing with life threatening situations often must consider alarms a lower priority. Still, many experts maintain that alarm systems may be deterrents if they are properly maintained and used in conjunction with all the basics. Before deciding on one, interview at least three companies, then request an on site survey from your local police department's crime-prevention unit.

Make sure to encase all outside electrical wiring for your security system and phone lines in a pipe at least three metres high on the wall. Also be careful when

power companies inform neighbourhoods of power outages during regular maintenance. Should thieves become aware of this they could potentially seize the opportunity to burglarize alarmed homes in the neighbourhood while the power is off.

### **Neighbourhood Watch Groups**

One thing that is common in every neighbourhood is empty streets most of the day. But there's usually someone home in the neighbourhood. Keep an eye on your neighbours' property, ask them to do the same for you, and call the police if you hear breaking glass, see someone lurking about or notice anything suspicious. You might also consider joining a community crime-watch group. Criminals know which neighbourhoods have watch groups and they avoid them like the plague. The local police department can help you set up a program.

### **A Special Note About Crime Against Seniors**

Robbery is not the only crime against seniors. Home invasion is a relatively new phenomenon that is becoming increasingly common. Vancouver police spokeswoman Constable Anne Drennan was quoted in the Alberta Report Newsmagazine as saying "A robber avoids confrontation, while these suspects (perpetrators of home invasions) are looking for confrontation." Such criminals often purposely target the home and choose to enter when they know the residents are home. According to the latest statistics from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, the national rate of violence against those aged 60 year and older increased 48% between 1996 and 1997.

It is especially important for seniors living in private residences to take some of the precautions outlined in this article.

### **Some simple precautions include:**

- Be sure that your mailbox is big enough to hide your day's mail.
- Use an answering machine so your phone doesn't ring unanswered – but never leave a message saying you're not in. Say, "I'm not available right now."

- If can give it proper care, get a dog. Or put a big, scuffed-up dog dish on your front porch.
- Put up a security system sign visible from the road. It's a proven deterrent.
- When you buy a new television,VCR or computer don't leave the empty carton on the front lawn for trash pickup – thieves will notice. Cut up the carton and dispose of it.
- Inscribe identifying marks or numbers such as your driver's licence number on the back of your possessions e.g. camera, DVD player. Contact your local police station to find out if they have an engraving tool available for use by the public.

**If you're going away over the holidays remember:**

- Use at least two interior timers – for lights in two different rooms – programmed to give the illusion of someone at home.
- Hire someone to shovel the walk if you are going away. Untouched snow on your walkway is a clear signal no one is home.
- Leave a news or talk radio station playing on a kitchen radio.
- Add a glass of water or a cup of coffee on the kitchen table.

Remember that, in general, thieves will choose the path of least resistance. The more difficult you make it for thief to enter quickly and unseen, the less likely you are to become a crime statistic.

## **THE “HOME HUNTERS”**

**Grant & Steve Hunter**

## **CHILD-PROOFING YOUR HOME**

What is childhood without the ability to explore and turn imagination loose on everyday household items? A cardboard box can become a spaceship or a fort. An attic becomes a Spanish galleon loaded with treasure. Kitchen dishes are ferried away for use in dinner parties serving invisible royalty. It is natural for children to explore their world with all their senses. However, this can mean they also venture into dangerous situations in the home. Children below seven years of age often have trouble making the correlation between their actions and potential consequences. Occasionally those actions result in injury. The following are some accident prevention tips for parents:

### **In General**

- Children like to mimic adults. They may try to seem grown up by taking their parent's medication. It is advisable to never let your children see you take medication and to store bottles well out of reach. Make sure all family members know what number to call in case of a poisoning. In most parts of Canada, 911 can dispatch an ambulance in the event of poisoning. You may also wish to check the front of your local phone book to see if there is a direct phone number for poisoning.
- Another case in which imitation can be hazardous is cigarette smoking. Children playing with matches and lighting cigarettes has led to serious burns and home fires.
- Place your plants on secure furniture at least one metre off the floor. Some household plants can be poisonous to people and pets including chrysanthemums (commonly referred to as mums), poinsettia, philodendron, aloe vera and hydrangea.

### **Kitchen**

- Never put inedible products in food or drink containers, even when you have re-labelled accordingly. Children may not be able to read the label but may recognize the container.
- Drawers should have stops to prevent them being fully pulled out.

- Keep sharp objects such as scissors and knives out of reach.
- Oven cleaners, disinfectants and other chemical agents should be stored in a locked cupboard or on a high shelf.
- Ideally, power outlets should be located well away from the sink and taps to prevent any electrical appliances from coming in contact with water.
- Cook on the rear stove elements to prevent children from reaching up and burning their hands. A stove guard fixed around the front and sides of the stove is also a good preventative measure.
- Childproof fasteners on kitchen drawers and cupboards will help keep them closed.

## **Bathroom**

- Put non-slip stickers on the bottom of the bathtub or shower stall.
- Young children should never be left unsupervised in the bath.
- Tap water can be hot enough to scald a child. Set your hot water heater to a maximum of 50 °C. Also ensure that hot water pipes are completely concealed or insulated to prevent burns.
- Shower and bath rails are a good safety measure for the whole family. Rails should be strong enough to support an adult's weight.
- Don't use soap holders or cups in the bathroom that are made of glass, ceramic or other shattering material. It is easy for small soapy hands to lose their grip on them.
- Electrical appliances should be unplugged and placed in cupboards when not in use. No electrical outlets or appliances should come within the reach of a child in the bath or splash area. If you do have outlets within reach, you may want to consider taping and painting over the outlet and keeping it covered until the children are older.

## Laundry

- Ironing boards are notoriously unsteady. A wall-mounted ironing board is preferable to one with legs as it folds away and can't be pulled over.
- Bleach and other cleaning agents should be stored out of reach in a locked cabinet.

## Bedrooms

- Bunk beds are not recommended for children under eight years of age. Bunk beds should have guardrails on all sides and a ladder that is permanently fixed to the bed.
- Young children tend to tumble and stumble quite often. Carpet in the bedroom is a good impact-absorbing material.
- Bookshelves and wall units should be firmly anchored to the wall to prevent a child from pulling them over.
- Use lead-free low-emission water-based paint in children's bedrooms as well as in other living areas in the home.

## Fire Hazards

- Make a fire evacuation plan and practice fire escape routes with your family twice a year.
- Be sure there is at least one window or sliding door on the upper level of your home which opens wide enough to allow an adult to exit easily in the event of a fire. You may also want to consider having a rope ladder and method of attaching it to the window frame.
- A fire extinguisher in the kitchen is essential. Also keep one in a room with a fireplace (at least 3 metres from the fire) and one on the upstairs level. Remember to read the instructions on how to use the extinguishers – you may save precious moments in an emergency.

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## **CLEAN INDOOR AIR**

It may surprise you to hear that the quality of the air inside your home is often worse than it is outdoors. In the average home, dust, allergens, chemicals, smoke, and other pollutants can reach dangerous levels. These unwelcome ingredients in our indoor air can contribute to drowsiness, headaches, memory loss, and lung disease among other problems. Ironically, changes in home construction to improve energy efficiency have contributed to the problem. If a home does not have an effective air exchange system in place to bring fresh air inside, stale, unhealthy air can become trapped indoors. Since it is not economical to keep the windows open during cold weather, homeowners have two options: reduce the sources of pollution within your home and clean the air.

What are the sources of indoor air pollution and how can you reduce their presence in your home?

Home Renovation:

If you've done some form of home renovation such as repainting a room, stripping and varnishing a table, or gluing together storage boxes, you've likely done a lot more than create an attractive home—you've inadvertently released unhealthy compounds into the air. Oil paint, latex paint and thinner all contain solvents, which can lead to respiration problems particularly in children. These products and most types of glue also contain toluene a chemical which can have adverse effects on the brain and respiratory system. Chemicals continue to be released from these products for days or even months.

One of the best ways to reduce indoor air pollution is to work outdoors or in a separate workshop when you need to paint, varnish, or use any type of sealant or solvent. Allow the item to dry completely outdoors. When you paint a room, open the windows to bring in fresh air. Close the doors and vents so that you do not allow fumes to get into your ventilation system. Despite being in a well-ventilated space, you will still be exposed to chemicals through your lungs and skin. Water-based paints are generally safer than oil-based paints and will dry faster. Responding to consumer demands, many manufacturers of paints and solvents have developed low-fume, less toxic products. You can now also find alternatives

to traditional mineral spirit paint thinner such as those made with an extract of oranges.

### Dry Cleaning

Perchloroethylene is the chemical most widely used in dry cleaning, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. In laboratory studies, it has been shown to cause cancer in animals. Recent studies indicate that people breathe in low levels of this chemical both in homes where dry-cleaned goods are stored and as they wear dry-cleaned clothing. Although dry cleaners recapture much of the perchloroethylene in the cleaning process so that they can reuse it, varying amounts of this chemical remain in the clothing. Dry cleaning also involves trichloroethylene, a chemical associated with liver cancer. If you pick up your clothing and find that it has a strong odour, it is your prerogative to ask the cleaners to dry it properly. To minimize your exposure (and save money in the process) check the labels on clothing before you purchase and opt for items that don't require dry cleaning.

### Smoke

Nowadays most people know that smoking is unhealthy and smoking indoors is even worse. The smell and the many chemicals released by cigarettes and cigars linger in the air. Light up outdoors and ask your family and your guests to do the same. This will help to reduce the fire hazard as well.

Another source of smoke is candles. Not all candles are created equal and thus not all produce the same amount or types of smoke. Most are made from petroleum, some from vegetable oil (e.g., soy oil), or animal fat, and others are made from beeswax. Those made from vegetable oil or beeswax typically produce the least smoke and tend to drip less.

One of the greatest sources of indoor smoke is from burning wood indoors in a fireplace or a stove. When wood burns, it releases dozens of chemicals and gases into the air including carbon monoxide and creosote. People die every year from carbon monoxide poisoning when using wood-burning fireplaces and stoves in poorly ventilated rooms. Because it's necessary to have proper ventilation, wood becomes a fairly ineffective source of heat. If you love to huddle around a real fireplace on a chilly evening, make sure that you have your chimney 'swept'

regularly and that the flue at the roof opening is not clogged with leaves or other debris.

### Beauty Product

The common beauty routine of applying perfume, make-up and nail polish, and using an assortment of hair dyes, bleach and hair removers involves a long list of chemicals, many of which can enter the skin and/or become airborne. Beauty is a dangerous and often smelly process! Although government agencies regulate most products, the standards are not as stringent as they are for food items. Studies have shown, for example, that hairdressers have a higher than average incidence non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and bladder cancer. (Books such as The Safe Shopper's Bible provide details about the chemicals and known cancer-causing agents in many common brands.) When using these products ensure that the room is well ventilated to the outdoors either by using a fan or opening a window.

### The Great Outdoors?

Throughout this article you see suggestions to open a window for ventilation. If you live near a busy road or in a large city it may not feel like the outdoor air is much cleaner. Plants are one way you can help to clean the air where you live. If you live on a busy street, consider planting a row of high evergreens to block some of the exhaust and noise. Plants will also absorb some of the carbon dioxide released by vehicles. Indoors, there are many plants that will help to remove airborne chemicals. For example, Gerbera Daisies and Chrysanthemums were found to be effective in the removal of benzene while Philodendrons helped to reduce airborne formaldehyde.

### Air Purifiers

As amazing as it sounds, some models of air purifiers actually add to indoor air pollution by emitting ozone, the most harmful component of smog. Electronic filters, generally marketed as electronic air cleaners, electrostatic precipitators and "ionizers" can also produce ozone, either as a by-product of use or intentionally. The American Lung Association and the California Department of Health have conducted studies of these appliances and have found that many of these appliances are not labeled properly to indicate that they produce ozone. Moderate levels of this gas can irritate eyes, nose, throat and lungs. Some

asthmatic individuals are more susceptible to ozone toxicity and can experience constricted airways.

A safer choice is a HEPA (High Efficiency Particle Arrestor) air cleaner. However, the American Lung Association recommends that the most effective way to get healthy air is to stop air pollution at its source. By changing the air filters in your heating and cooling system on a regular basis and implementing some of the suggestions in this article, you will help keep you and your family breathing easy.

## **THE "HOME HUNTERS"**

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# **COOKING AND SAFETY TIPS FOR THE BACKYARD CHEF**

On summer days, most people are happy to leave their hot kitchens behind to cook in the great outdoors. What could be better than smelling the aroma of grilling steaks as you enjoy a backyard picnic? If you are like the millions of other Canadians who plan to barbeque this season, the following tips may make your experience a safer and more delicious experience.

## Safe Grilling Tips

More people than would care to admit have scorched their eyebrows and arm hairs attempting to light a barbeque (and keep it lit)! However, a poorly maintained barbeque is more than a beauty hazard—it can very dangerous.

Considering that a barbeque can get as hot as 370° C (700° F) and has an open flame and a large fuel source, it's an understatement to say that safety is an issue. If you start the season by pulling your barbeque onto your deck close to house, opening the gas lines and lighting a match, your steak may not be the only thing getting grilled! Keep these safety tips in mind to help you enjoy a long and healthy barbeque season:

- Spider webs and insect nests can partially or completely block the flow of propane through the tubes resulting in a small smoky yellow flame or the burner may be difficult to light. If the tubes are blocked, it may cause the propane to burn outside of the tubes, which will damage your barbeque. You can use a pipe cleaner, but a special brush designed for this task is available at most barbeque stores.
- Never use spirits (alcohol or paint thinner) to start a barbeque. Lighter fluid can be used at the beginning to get the fire started but must never be used on a hot barbecue.
- Keep the barbeque at least 1.5 metres away from any flammable objects.

- Glass can also be damaged by the intense heat of a barbeque so be sure to maintain a space of at least 1.5 metres between your barbeque and windows, sliding doors, glass railings, etc.
- Keep the barbeque on a level surface.
- Do not attempt to move a lit barbeque—it may tip over causing burns or a fire.
- Do not cook inside gazebos or tents. The gases produced during combustion can be toxic.
- Keep dogs and children away from the barbeque during cooking.
- Choose a location where smoke and burning ashes will not be blown into the house, trees, etc.
- Keep a bucket of water or a garden hose nearby in case of accidents.

### Cooking Tips

- Before you fire up the barbeque, be sure the grill is clean to prevent food from sticking. Scrub it with steel wool then wash and rinse it thoroughly if needed.
- Coat the grill with a thin layer of vegetable oil once the grill is hot.
- Bring meat to room temperature before barbequing. This will help the meat to cook more evenly. Remember that meat should be left at room temperature for no more than an hour to prevent the growth of unhealthy bacteria.
- Marinate meat to tenderize it and add moisture. Vegetables require a shorter period of time to marinate; even 20 minutes prior to grilling can add wonderful flavour to your favourite vegetables.
- Baste the meat with marinade as it cooks. This will help seal in the juices and prevent burning. If the marinade is high in sugar, baste the meat only during the last five minutes of barbequing as sugar burns easily.

- To protect your health, be sure that you do not baste the meat on the grill with the same marinade used for the raw meat. Use a fresh batch. Because salt draws out moisture, it is not a good idea to add too much salt during cooking—leave the seasoning to your guests.
- Turn items with tongs or a spatula. Don't pierce with a fork—flavourful juices can be lost.
- Burgers should always be cooked thoroughly to prevent Haemorrhagic Colitis caused by E.coli bacteria. The very young and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to this unpleasant and sometimes fatal infection.
- Never place the grilled meat back on the dish or board where the raw meat was placed.
- Whenever possible, buy your hamburger from a butcher who will grind the meat for you on the spot. Choose a boneless cut.

### Grilling vegetables

- Coat vegetables in Italian dressing or olive oil to protect the skin from drying and burning. Sprinkle the vegetables with herbs such as basil, oregano, rosemary and thyme.
- A grilling wok or a wire basket makes it easy to grill vegetables without any slipping through the cracks! Most barbeque retailers will carry these and many other accessories.

### Cleaning

Not only is it difficult to get a grill spotless, but also most people don't want to put that much effort into cleaning a barbeque. To make fast work of the chore, scrub the grill with a wire brush for a minute immediately after removing food. Close the lid and let the residual heat of the barbeque char the remaining food particles. Brush the grill again when it is cool and, if necessary, remove it and soak it in hot soapy water.

**THE "HOME HUNTERS" - Grant & Steve Hunter**

## **EVICTING MICE FROM YOUR HOME**

Mice may seem harmless enough, yet these tiny creatures, a mere 20 grams (1/16 of an ounce) or less, can gnaw through anything from wood to wiring, contaminate food stores, and spread potentially deadly diseases. Homeowners who spot mice or the telltale signs of their presence, are well advised to take action. Where there is one mouse, there is bound to be more, possibly many more.

### **Why are mice such persistent pests?**

A female house mouse can breed up to eight times a year and give birth to a litter of 4 to 10 young each time. Her offspring will be ready to reproduce in approximately 60 days. That means that two mice can produce at least 32 young every year.

Mice are highly adaptable – they will eat almost anything from tiny crumbs on the floor, dog food, the stuffing from sofa and chairs, etc. Many cabin owners have opened their retreat in the spring to find that mice have gnawed through everything from pillows to running shoes!

Mice have an amazing ability to fit their tiny bodies through even the tiniest of spaces. Pest control companies have found that mice can squeeze through a space as small as 1 centimetre (approximately ¼ inch)!

These pests are also quick and agile—two traits that have helped them escape predators over the millennia. Not only can they run at great speeds relative to their size, they can also climb rough vertical surfaces such as wooden or brick walls.

### **Common Mouse Species in Canada**

When homeowners discover a mouse infestation, the perpetrators are likely to be one of two species: the deer mouse or house mouse.

*Deer Mouse* – A deer mouse's body is approximately 14 centimetres (5.5 inches) long from its head to the tip of its tail. It is brown or grey on top, has a white belly and feet, large ears, large eyes and a furry tail that is typically white on the

underside. Deer mice are active all year. During the winter, they live on stored nuts and seeds much the way squirrels do. Deer mice construct nests under logs, in hollow tree cavities, or in abandoned bird nests. As the weather grows colder, deer mice look for shelter in houses, garages, storage sheds, and campers.

*House Mouse* – The house mouse is small and slender. It has a pointed snout, large ears, and its fur is grey to light brown on top, light brown on the underside. The house mouse was inadvertently brought from Asia in the cargo of ships in the 1800's. The great adaptability of this species has allowed it to thrive almost everywhere that people live. Although the house mouse usually lives outdoors in the summer, it will seek shelter indoors during the winter.

### **Damage and Dangers of Mice**

In the search for food, mice often destroy the contents of cupboards, furniture, books, wiring in the walls, etc., through their gnawing, urine and droppings. They contaminate surfaces and leave an unpleasant odour.

Even more seriously, mice have also been linked to life-threatening diseases. Scientists have found a correlation between the presence of mice and the incidence of asthma, particularly in children. Mice can also carry the Hantavirus, a virus which can cause sudden and severe respiratory distress in humans and has resulted in deaths. The virus can become airborne when rodent droppings or nests are stirred up, as during cleaning. People can become infected by inhaling the virus or by handling infected rodents. Another disease associated with mice is Salmonella. A person infected with this bacterium (usually after ingesting food prepared on a contaminated surface) may suffer diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps that can last up to three days. If the infection spreads to the blood stream it can be fatal if not treated promptly with antibiotics.

### **Evicting Mice From Your Home Permanently and Safely**

There are three common lethal mouse control methods: poison, kill-traps and glue traps. Aside from humane considerations, poison is not recommended because a poisoned mouse may die inside the walls leaving a very unpleasant odour. Likewise, a nursing female that is killed in a trap may leave behind babies that will die inside the walls. Traps and poisons will not stop a mouse infestation–

only mouse-proofing to find and eliminate mouse entry points into your home will solve the problem.

The first step in mouse-proofing is to eliminate their food sources within your home. Sweep or vacuum up crumbs promptly and store food in glass or metal canisters. Mice particularly like grains, so store cereals in a high, closed cupboard or in canisters. Pet food, birdseed and grass seed should also be kept in tightly sealed, metal containers. If you must leave food out for a cat or dog for long periods of time, make sure it is elevated.

The next step is to discover and seal all possible points where mice may enter your home. Check under kitchen and bathroom sink cabinets around plumbing fixtures for any gaps and signs of infestation. Slide out your oven and check to see that mice have not been slipping through the electrical fixture opening—crumbs that fall around the stove attract mice. Also check vents, air conditioning hook-ups, chimney flues, and weather stripping around doors. If you find a gap or signs of infestation, use flexible metal sheet or mesh (available in building supply stores) to seal up any holes. The metal can be bent and forced into holes around pipes as well as nailed onto a flat surface. For spaces that are too small for metal sheet or mesh, you can use pieces of stainless steel or copper scouring pads (available at grocery or department stores) to stuff into holes. Never use steel wool as it rusts and falls apart in a short time.

If you find mouse droppings or expired mice in or around your home, be sure to spray with a disinfecting solution of diluted bleach before cleaning. This will reduce the amount of dust that gets stirred up. Wear rubber gloves and a filter mask, and seal the trash in double plastic bags.

Although mice give the household cat opportunities to practice hunting, no homeowner wants these unwelcome occupants! Following these tips will help you protect your property from these persistent pests.

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## FINE-TUNING YOUR HOME INSURANCE

For the price of approximately \$30 per month for a renter to insure an apartment to \$200 per month for a homeowner to obtain coverage, insurance can ease the loss of a home and possessions in the event of fire, theft, flood, etc. This is a small price to pay considering the replacement value of our possessions and the cost of homes today. Although most people understand the importance of home insurance, many do not have the right coverage. In some cases, the coverage is not adequate following a major renovation or a large purchase. In other cases, changes in living and working arrangements require changes in an insurance policy. Let's explore some of the factors you should consider in relation to your home insurance.

First, it pays to know the basic facts about home insurance. Most people have a package policy that covers not only the home itself including detached structures such as a garage or barn, but also the contents. The contents of the home are protected whether they are in the home or temporarily away from it. For example, if someone steals your mountain bike when you slip into the corner store for a cool drink, it would be covered by home insurance up to the dollar amount specified in your policy and less the deductible. If your notebook computer gets stolen out of your vehicle, your home insurance – not your automobile insurance – would cover the loss.

In the event that someone gets injured on your property and sues you, your home insurance would protect you. The same is true if you accidentally injure someone or cause damage to their property. For example, if a postal delivery person falls and is injured on your icy walkway, home insurance would cover you. Likewise, if you run into another biker on the trail and injure them, your insurance would cover the damages and legal fees to defend you in court. Keep in mind that the limits of liability are established in your policy. If you wish to increase your liability coverage, your insurance company may allow you to do this by increasing your monthly premiums accordingly.

Over the years, an insurance policy may not keep up with changes to the home. If a home undergoes extensive remodeling such as adding an extra room, an expansive deck or a garage, they won't be covered unless you inform your

insurance company and adjust your policy. These renovations will not necessarily increase your monthly premiums and in the event of a fire or other misfortune, you'll be compensated. Remodeling can be an expensive undertaking and insurance may be the only way for you to afford to rebuild damaged structures. The following are some other reasons why you may want to adjust your policy.

If you get a dog, you will need to inform your insurance company. Many companies will increase your premium, or not cover you at all, if your dog is on the company's list of bite-prone dogs such as pit bulls, Rottweilers or wolf hybrids. Dog bites cost insurers millions of dollars every year.

In some regions, changes in home construction methods have led to leaks and subsequent mold problems. Often, the problem doesn't show up for years after construction. Some companies exclude mold from their standard policies but offer coverage for mold at an extra premium. If you are concerned about the possibility of mold, call several local companies and compare your options.

If you have purchased luxury items since you first got your policy, you may wish to amend it. Home insurance usually provides coverage up to a few thousand dollars for all of your furs and jewelry. If this is not adequate, you can purchase an additional personal property endorsement or floater to insure them for their appraised value.

Likewise, if you make a large purchase such as a home entertainment unit or a hot tub, ensure that you have adequate coverage. Insurance companies may need to see receipts for expensive items.

If you have joined the ranks of the self-employed and work from home, your computer, printer and fax machine are essential to your livelihood and are well worth insuring properly. Most insurance companies will pay you what these items are worth, i.e. the depreciated value, rather than the replacement cost. We all know how quickly computers and other electronics become obsolete when a new model comes on the market! Extra coverage that provides replacement value may be essential to your work situation.

Another common change in the home is new people coming and going. If you get married or divorced, there will likely be additional or fewer belongings in the house respectively.

If you run a business from your home such as a daycare, you will likely need to increase your liability coverage. If a child trips and gets injured on a coffee table or has an allergic reaction to a food, you may find yourself in financial ruin paying for legal fees and damages. Extra coverage is essential for any businessperson who brings clients into the home.

If you live in an area prone to floods and hurricanes, standard insurance policies may not cover your home and possessions. You may need to purchase special coverage, although, depending on the level of risk in your area, insurance companies may not provide coverage at any price. If that is the case, check whether there are any government programs available in your region.

Homeowners who never before needed to be particularly concerned about forest fires, floods, mudslides, hurricanes, etc., are finding themselves at risk due to changing weather patterns in recent years. Take a look at your coverage and consider upgrading it if possible.

As they say, hindsight is 20/20 and most people who have experienced a calamity such as a flood or theft often wish they had had more coverage rather than less. Shop around for good rates and speak to your insurance representative to discover how to best protect your property.

## **THE "HOME HUNTERS"**

**Grant & Steve Hunter**

## **FIRE HAZARDS IN YOUR HOME**

In a matter of minutes fire can consume a lifetime of memories and treasures. Our homes are our refuge from the world, a place of comfort and joy and yet we often invite the potential for fire into every room. These hazards may be a physical object but they can also be a result of our actions and habits. Knowing the risks and how to avoid them can help ensure you and your home stay safe.

Fire needs only the slightest opportunity to burst to life: an overloaded electrical outlet, a forgotten cigarette, a spark from a fireplace, a dishcloth touching a stove element. In fact, your home may contain dozens of unnecessary hazards. One of the best ways to identify them is to inspect your home room by room using the following checklist.

### **Bathroom**

It may surprise you to discover that a bathroom can contain fire hazards! In fact, it's our efforts to be beautiful that often the culprits. Consider hair spray. Like most aerosol sprays, hair spray is highly flammable. Make sure that no heat source such as a curling iron or open flame such as a candle is nearby. Aerosol spray cans pose another danger - they can explode with great force if they get hot.

Nail polish and polish remover are both highly flammable and release fumes that can be ignited if exposed to flame or heat. Be equally mindful when handling and disposing of the cotton balls soaked in polish or remover.

Some disinfectants such as toilet bowl cleaner can also be flammable - finally a new way to kill toilet germs! On second thought, it may be wiser to keep cleaners away from heat or flame and stored out of reach of children and pets. Natural cleaners tend to be less caustic and hazardous.

Never use appliances near water. If they come in contact with water, the result can be sparks or potentially an electrical fire.

### **Kitchen**

I once had a neighbour whose shrill smoke alarm served as the dinner bell in his family! If excessive smoke is a common occurrence in your home take a few moments to examine your cooking area. Remove any food that has dropped into the stove element or on the bottom of the oven.

Do not hang dish clothes near your stove as they may fall onto hot elements. Cloths hung over the oven handle may be an invitation for curious children to pull down on the oven door.

Check the cords on all appliances for wear and fraying. Department stores often offer repair service.

Wear tight sleeves when cooking. Loose-fitting garments can catch fire.

With limited space many of us store cleaning products in the kitchen. Floor and furniture polishes, spot removers and oven cleaners can ignite if exposed to heat or flame. Store these items as far away from appliances as possible.

Buy a fire extinguisher for your kitchen and store it in somewhere handy between two and three metres away from your stove. Take a moment to read the instructions- if a fire does start in your kitchen that knowledge will save valuable seconds.

## **Living Areas**

Most living areas have a television, VCR, DVD, stereo, and/or computer. To avoid overloading outlets, plug your appliances into one or more circuit breakers. If there is a problem with your electronics, a lightning strike or a power surge, the circuit breaker can help prevent an electrical fire.

Allow plenty of air space around electronics particularly around the back vents and cords.

If you smoke, check the areas you have recently used for any ashes before going to bed. Hot ash on carpet or in couches can smolder many minutes before beginning to burn.

Each light fixture is designed to use a light bulb of a specific wattage. Use light bulbs with wattage at or below the maximum prescribed by the manufacturer.

## **Bedrooms**

Candles add ambiance and induce relaxation. Unfortunately many people have fallen asleep with candles burning to awake to fire or worse, they are overcome with fumes from a fire and never awake. Ensure that candles are

placed in sturdy candleholders with bases wide enough to catch the wax. Always set them up on a solid, flat, heat-resistant surface.

Smoke detectors should be tested regularly to be sure they are functioning correctly.

Keep a working flashlight next to each family member's bed.

Check for overloaded outlets, extension cords and heaters that are too close to combustible materials.

If you smoke, do not smoke in bed.

### **Basement**

Basements typically house a furnace and a hot water heater both of which are sources of heat that could ignite vapours from flammable liquids. Fumes can accumulate to dangerously high concentrations in poorly ventilated basements. Paint, paint thinners, gasoline, candle oil and other such items should be stored outside of the house in a shed. Always store flammable liquids in properly labeled containers with tight-fitting lids. Avoid glass jars, which break easily releasing dangerous fumes. Any rags used for cleaning these liquids should also be stored in a sealed metal container.

### **Hobby Shop or Work Area**

Our hobbies and household chores often involve paint and varnishes, electric saws, sanders and a variety of chemicals. Together these items provide fuel and fire. Add the pile of newspapers and rags nearby and the results can be tragic. Be sure to store turpentine, mineral spirits and other solvents, oil-based paints, stains and varnishes, and charcoal-lighter fluid in sealed metal containers. Discard of rags, newspapers and other debris surrounding the work area.

Fire can be the most destructive force of nature to affect our homes. By taking a few moments to review the hazards in your home, your memories and your treasures will stay safe for years to come.

## **THE "HOME HUNTERS"**

**Grant & Steve Hunter**

## HEALTHY HOUSEHOLD CLEANSERS

Over the last 75 years, hundreds of chemicals have been created and introduced into the environment. Our air, water, soil, and food indicate that certain chemicals have lasting and often detrimental effects on the natural environment and on our health. Despite these grim facts, many of us unknowingly use toxic chemicals on a regular basis. Household cleaners and other everyday products create harmful environments within our homes.

Environment Canada lists the following as "hazardous" materials:

- chlorine bleach
- contact cement
- drain cleaners
- flea collars and sprays
- kerosene
- lye
- mothballs
- nail polish remover
- solvents
- spot removers
- stains and finishes
- toilet cleaners
- oven cleaners

A study released by the US Environmental Protection Agency in 1985 found 70 different commonly-occurring chemicals in American homes. One of these chemicals is chlorine. Chances are very good that you have one or more cleaning products in your home that contain chlorine (also labelled as sodium hypochlorite or simply hypochlorite). Chlorine or its derivatives are used in automatic dishwashing detergents, bleach, chlorinated disinfectant cleaners, mildew removers, and toilet bowl cleaners.

Chlorine can be harmful to the skin and lungs and, in very high concentrations, can be fatal. The fumes of cleaners containing chlorine can irritate the lungs. This is particularly dangerous for people suffering from heart conditions or chronic respiratory problems such as asthma or emphysema. These risks are compounded when the cleaners are used in small, poorly ventilated rooms, such as the bathroom. Chlorine is also a highly corrosive substance, capable of damaging skin, eyes, and other membranes.

Another hazard with chlorine products is exposure to chlorine gas. When products containing chlorine are added to detergents, the resulting mixture releases chlorine gas and chloramines, both of which are toxic gases that can injure the deep tissues of the lungs. Whenever bleach is added to a load of laundry for example, chlorine gas and chloramines are produced. These chemicals will enter the air when the washer is opened and will also be present in the rinse water. See the following list of natural cleaners for an alternative to bleach.

Another controversial group of chemicals are Nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs). According to Environment Canada, NPEs have been used for more than 40 years as detergents, emulsifiers, wetting agents, dispersing agents and in a variety of institutional and domestic cleaning products and degreasers. NPEs are also used in cosmetics and paints.

Environment Canada studies have found the presence of NPEs in fresh water supplies, sediment, fish and beluga whale tissue. NPEs have been reported to cause a number of estrogenic responses in a variety of aquatic organisms. Although NPEs have been classified as toxic, they continue to be used in many consumer products.

NPE's and other chemicals are suspected endocrine disruptors that act like hormones in the body and interfere with our endocrine systems. Hormones deliver chemical messages throughout the body in order to regulate numerous functions. Endocrine disruptors prevent hormones from delivering their messages. As a result, cells do not behave normally; they divide when they should not or fail to function as they should.

The list of suspected problems with various chemicals is practically endless. Although many traditional cleaning products are labelled with warnings such as flammable or corrosive, a greater hazard may be the long-term effects. Fortunately, there are numerous natural alternatives. The following are a few "recipes" for effective household cleaners.

These are the basic ingredients for most cleansers:

- Borax (sodium borate): It deodorizes, removes stains and prevents mold and odours.
- Lemon Juice: Cuts through grease and stains on aluminum and porcelain.
- Baking Soda (sodium bicarbonate): An all-purpose, non-toxic cleaner. It cleans, deodorizes, scours, polishes and removes stains.
- Pure Soap flakes or Castile Soap: general cleaner with many uses
- Table Salt (sodium chloride): A mild disinfectant and makes an abrasive, but gentle, scouring powder.
- Vinegar (diluted acetic acid): Removes mildew, stains, grease and wax build-up.
- Washing Soda (sodium carbonate): Cuts grease and disinfects. It will also increase the cleaning power of soap.

### **Antibacterial/Anti-fungal Multipurpose Cleaner**

Fill an empty spray bottle almost to the top with equal parts vinegar and water leaving enough room for 60 ml (4 Tbsp) of lemon juice and 15 ml (1 Tbsp) of tea tree oil. Shake before spraying.

### **Laundry detergent**

Add 2 parts soap flakes, 1 part Borax and 6 parts hot water to a large container with a tight-fitting lid. Shake well. Allow to cool. You may wish to add 1 part washing soda if available.

### **Scrub cleanser**

Mix equal parts baking soda, Borax and liquid castile soap (liquid dishwashing soap) to create a paste. Use full strength on tubs, sinks and toilets and dilute for use on counters and floors. Add a few drops of essential oil for a fresh scent.

## **Fabric softener**

Mix together 1 part baking soda, 1 part vinegar and 2 parts water. Stir well. Store in a properly labelled container. Add 60 ml of the solution to the final rinse cycle.

## **Glass Cleaner**

Add equal parts vinegar and water to a spray bottle. Spray on glass surfaces and wipe immediately for a streak free shine.

## **Furniture Polish**

Mix 3 parts light mineral oil (available at most drug stores), 1 part olive oil and a drop of lemon juice. Dip the edge of a soft cloth in the mixture and rub into the wood surface. Buff with a clean cloth.

## **Silver cleaner**

This one is rather unorthodox but is a healthier alternative to highly corrosive cleaners! Dip an old soft-bristled toothbrush in warm water. Spread a thick layer of toothpaste on the brush and gently scrub away the tarnish on your silver.

## **Garbage Disposal Freshener**

To eliminate garbage disposal odours and clean the blades, add ice cubes and lemon and/or orange rinds. Run the garbage disposal until pulverized.

## **Essential Oil Air Freshener**

Many types of traditional aerosol air fresheners contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs) such as xylene, ketones, and aldehydes. Here are two less expensive and healthier alternatives.

1. In a bowl, add 250 ml (1 cup) baking soda plus a few drops of your choice of essential oil to eliminate odors and leave a pleasant scent. Use your favourite essential oil or try a few of these fresh choices: pine, lavender, lemon, lime, cypress, wintergreen, grapefruit or orange. Place bowls in closets, bathrooms or any room that needs freshening.

- 2) Instead of baking soda you can use kitty litter to absorb odors. Add a few drops of essential oil for scent. You may want to keep this freshener out of view!

### **Oven Cleaner**

1 part borax, 2 parts salt, 2 parts baking soda and 3 parts vinegar Mix the ingredients to create a paste. Spread thickly over the oven walls. Allow to set for 30 minutes then wipe clean using vinegar.

These natural cleansers will get your home clean without any noxious fumes or corrosive agents. Remember, the extra ingredient for tough jobs is a little elbow grease but it's worth the effort!

## **THE "HOME HUNTERS"**

**Grant & Steve Hunter**

## **HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM A HOME INVASION**

According to Statistics Canada, almost 9 out of every 1,000 people were victims of break and enter in 2002. This number includes two types of crimes: robbery and home invasion. There is one main difference between burglars and home invaders: burglars wish to avoid confrontation with homeowners whereas home invaders typically rely on personal contact to gain entry to a residence. Due to this personal contact, home invasions pose a greater risk of violence. The following are some steps you can take to protect yourself and your property.

Home invaders depend on you being home. They either don't have the skills to open a door or window, or they don't want to take the chance of being observed while they attempt to do so. Their skills rest with convincing homeowners to open their doors to them. They are often impostors and persuasive con artists.

Consider this scenario: a delivery person rings your doorbell with a bouquet of flowers in hand. You take a look through the peephole then open the door. Most likely the delivery person is legitimate but you will find out very quickly if they are not.

The most important step in protecting yourself is to never open the door to a stranger without verifying their identity. Ask for the name of their company then call to confirm that they actually work for the organization. If an unexpected delivery arrives, ask for the name of the sending party; if the sender is a relative or acquaintance, it is likely a legitimate delivery. However, never hesitate to keep the door locked and ask the person to wait as you call to confirm their identity. It is better to seem impolite than to be a victim of a home invasion. If the person disappears during your phone call, contact the police; they may be looking for another target.

If someone appears on your doorstep asking to use your phone due to an emergency, it might be a real emergency. Ask them who they would like you to call on their behalf. If their emergency is legitimate, they will provide the information. If they insist on making the call themselves, phone the police.

An unexpected visit from a police officer can be disconcerting – the first thought may be 'have I paid my parking tickets?' Home invaders have been known to impersonate police officers. They count on that moment of nervousness and the

fact the police are trusted figures in the community. If the person is a police officer, they should appreciate that you make them wait while you verify their name and badge number.

Also consider the following precautions:

1. Install a peephole. For about \$20 and the time it takes to drill a hole in your door, you will be able to identify visitors. A peephole will also allow you to see business cards and identity badges.
2. Mount motion sensor lights around the entryways to your home. When a person steps up to the door, you will have a good view of them day or night. Be sure to place the lights high enough to be out of reach of a criminal who could potentially disable the lights.
3. Put a large dog dish by the main entryway and keep it filled with water. Whether you have a pit bull, a miniature poodle or no dog at all, this is an effective ploy. Criminals prefer to avoid a noisy and potentially dangerous confrontation with a dog. Install an intercom that will allow you to converse clearly with the person outside. Video intercoms are another option. Both types may need to be installed by a professional depending on your knowledge of electrical wiring. If you have bushes or other vegetation outside your entryway, be sure to keep them trimmed so that they will not provide cover for a potential intruder. Listen to your instincts. If you sense someone is dangerous or dishonest, you may be picking up on clues in the person's body language or tone of voice.

### **Other Forms of Home Invasion**

Not all criminals will attempt the charade of impersonating a delivery person or even a police officer. They may instead wait for you to return home and force their way inside when you unlock the door. The best way to prevent this situation is to be aware of your surroundings before you get to the door.

If you see someone lurking around your property as you return home, keep going. Drive around the neighbourhood for a few minutes. If the person is still there

when you return, drive to the nearest payphone or use a cell phone from a safe distance to call the police.

If you are walking back to your home and see someone lurking around your property, keep walking. Don't go to your immediate neighbour's house and ring the doorbell because you may be putting your neighbour in danger. Walk a block away and find a residence or business where you can make a call.

If you live in an apartment building, you likely have often encountered a situation in which someone is standing at the main lobby door when you leave. Opening the door to a stranger or even a familiar face puts your neighbours and your property at risk. The familiar face may even belong to a former tenant who no longer has a right to be in the building due to a divorce or domestic dispute. Politely hold and close the door behind you. If you are concerned that the person may push their way past you, try another exit or phone the police.

Preventing a home invasion requires awareness of your surroundings, assertiveness to verify the identities of visitors, and planning to make your entryway as uninviting to criminals as possible. Unfortunately, home invasions are a reality, but by taking precautionary steps such as these, you can minimize the danger to yourself and your family.

## **THE "HOME HUNTERS"**

**Grant & Steve Hunter**

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SMOKE DETECTORS**

Everyone dreads the idea of a fire destroying his or her home. It's hard to imagine the treasured possessions accumulated over a lifetime turned to ashes and charred remains. Even more difficult is coping with the irreplaceable loss of loved ones. Fortunately, much of this could be prevented. The number of reported fires in houses with smoke alarms is 10 times less than in those without alarms.

Most people realize that detectors are their best protection in a fire yet approximately 13% of Canadian households don't use them. A lack of information and reluctance to make the investment seem to be the main reasons. These homeowners put themselves in danger when they are most vulnerable. Statistically, the worst fires occur in the evening when people are sleeping. By the time they smell smoke or feel heat, the fire is rampant and the occupants of the home can become trapped or overcome by the carbon monoxide present in smoke. Alarms are designed to sound at the first sign of smoke increasing the odds that both the residents and their possessions will survive.

It's important to be aware that there are different types of fires and different types of detectors. Ionization alarms are triggered when smoke particles interrupt the ion current that flows between two metal plates. The advantage of these detectors is that the smoke can be invisible to the human eye, while remaining "visible" to the ionization detector. The ion conductivity is produced by a tiny amount of radioactive material—Americium-241 (or AM-241). Some research has been done which indicates ionization detectors may not be very good at detecting smouldering fires which produce small amounts of particles. These detectors work best in smoky fires such as kitchen fires.

Photoelectric devices work on an entirely different principle—smoke particles cross a steady beam of light and set off the alarm much like a motion sensor. There are conflicting reports on the efficiency of this detector and it is recommended that homeowners invest in a dual photoelectric/ionization device which combines both functions. At the very least, if you already have an ionization device you should invest in a photoelectric version and visa versa.

For greater protection install at least three alarms—one in the living room (41 percent of fatal fires start in the living room), one near the bedroom and one place few people think of—in the basement. Hot water heaters and furnaces in the basement can pose a significant fire hazard especially since a small fire there is likely to go unnoticed until the fire is too large to control.

You should also consider wiring your detectors for a chain–reaction. Normally, an isolated fire would have to burn intensely before setting off alarms at the opposite end of the home. Chain–reaction alarms sound simultaneously at the first sign of smoke giving your family valuable minutes to get to safety. When you purchase alarms, ask about connective wiring options.

Remember that tradition noise–producing alarms are ineffective for occupants who are deaf or hard of hearing. There have been great new innovations in the warning signal itself. A new product, The Scent of Life Signalling Device releases a pungent aerosol spray into the air when smoke is detected. This device also works well in high noise level areas. For more information on this product check out <http://www.globweb.com/paradigm/solmain.htm>. Strobe light alarms are also effective for the hearing impaired but must be placed well within view. If you opt for a strobe alarm for residential use be sure to place one in the bedroom. The annual fire–death rate in houses without alarms is 130 deaths per million households. By installing several battery–operated detectors in each house, that rate would be reduced by almost two–thirds. Battery operated models range from \$20–50. The safety rates are even better with wired–in smoke detectors which have been mandatory in new housing since 1980. These devices are more heat–resistant and reliable than battery operated alarms. Wired–in systems cost approximately \$500.

Whichever system you choose be sure to follow installation and maintenance instructions. Battery operated models will either use staggered beeps or a blinking light to indicate low power. Don't wait that long though—install new batteries when you change your clocks for daylight savings time in the spring and fall. You and your family will sleep easy knowing you're protected. Hopefully the only alarm you'll hear when you're sleeping will have a snooze button!

**THE “HOME HUNTERS” - Grant & Steve Hunter**

## **SHARING A HOME WITH PETS**

Pets are an important part of life for many people. We adopt them as family; we feed, spoil and play with them; and we take them into our homes. That last point can be the most difficult one to adapt to for both pet and owner. To pets, the home is a place fraught with dangers such as hot stoves and chemical cleaners, and places and things that are off-limits. Most need regular access to the outdoors. Likewise, many owners are allergic in varying degrees to pet dander (skin flakes) and must cope with the shedding hair and odour that commonly accompany cats and dogs. How do we enjoy feline and canine companionship while making home life more pleasant?

### **Indoors/Outdoors**

Dogs usually need access to the outdoors every 5 to 8 hours. If a house-trained pet is kept indoors for longer periods, it can be quite stressful for the animal that wishes to be obedient. Today there are many solutions for owners without a fenced yard. In some urban areas, dog-walking services are available. Ask for references and be sure that the company is bonded before you give them keys to your home. 'Dog daycares' are another good option. If you have a neighbour with a pet, you may be able to swap dog-walking duties.

Cats are more comfortable remaining indoors. In fact, they often act like masters of the house! A clean litter box, fresh water and regular feeding will keep most cats satisfied. If your cat has been de-clawed, it will not be able to properly defend itself outdoors. Sometimes, cats that spend many hours a day alone require another cat as companionship. Introducing a kitten or a young cat to the home may be easier than introducing a cat of a similar age. Your local animal shelter should be able to provide some personalized guidance.

### **Cat Litter**

Crystalline silica, found in many cat litter products, is irritating to the lungs. It is also a known carcinogenic. Prolonged exposure to crystalline silica (an oxygen-silica compound) can cause a disabling, irreversible and sometimes fatal disease called silicosis. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, more than one million U.S. workers are exposed to crystalline silica, and each year more than 250 die from silicosis. The degree of exposure for cat owners and their pets can be almost

impossible to measure because the amount of crystalline silica varies by brand and other factors related to usage. The safest option for both cats and owners is to use litter brands labelled "dust-free" or "crystalline silica free".

### **Toxoplasmosis**

Cat feces can transmit a disease called toxoplasmosis. A single-celled parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii* can cause flu-like symptoms, swollen lymph glands, and muscle aches that can last for a month. If the immune system is not able to combat the parasite, eye and brain damage can result. Pregnant women, young children and people with weakened immune systems should never clean out a litter box. Also note that cats like to use gardens as well as litter boxes, so be sure to not touch your eyes or mouth when gardening and wash hands thoroughly afterwards.

### **Fleas and Ticks**

If you have ever worn a cast, you know how frustrating it can be to have an itch that you can't relieve! Imagine how a dog or cat must feel with hundreds of fleas biting day and night. Alleviating flea problems can be a difficult process and one that can be unhealthy for both pet and owner.

Flea collars are generally not recommended because they continuously expose pets to compounds that are toxic to insects as well as mammals. These chemicals can be particularly harmful to puppies, kittens and pregnant pets. According to the Safe Shopper's Bible, many common brands of flea collars contain irritants, allergens, carcinogens, neurotoxins and chemicals that can interfere with reproduction. Herbal collars were found to be safe and moderately effective at repelling fleas.

Many brands of flea and tick powders and sprays can cause health problems for pets and their owners. The Environmental Protection Agency reports that a well-known brand containing two powerful pesticides, DEET and fenvalerate, was responsible for more than 200 dog and cat poisonings including 26 deaths in 1987. Many products still contain these chemicals. Carbaryl is another commonly used chemical that has been linked to birth defects in canines according to

Consumer Reports. Humans can inhale and absorb chemicals through the skin while applying the treatments.

Some food supplements can help both pets and their owners who are being bitten by fleas. Brewers' yeast, garlic and B-complex vitamins are reportedly helpful in reducing bites. Growing rue and rosemary in and around your home can help to repel fleas.

### **Ticks**

Reducing exposure to tick habitat is the best way to prevent infestations. These insects are active from spring until fall but June and July are the highest risk months. Tick bites can transmit diseases to humans such as Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Reduce the risk by staying out of heavy brush and thick grass in the summer months. If you frequent such areas, wear a hat, pants and socks. Afterwards, check yourself for ticks—they can be as small as a poppy seed or as large as a centimetre long. Use a flea comb to brush your pet then use a sticky lint comb to find tiny ticks.

### **Odour**

Carpet can trap pet dander, dirt, hair and other particles that can contribute to odour. Hardwood, tile, vinyl and other solid surfaces are easier to keep clean when you have a pet. In carpeted areas, apply borax and baking soda to the carpet; leave for several hours then vacuum. Adding salt to the mixture can also help kill fleas.

These tips can help you and your pet enjoy a healthy home!

**THE “HOME HUNTERS”**

**Grant & Steve Hunter**

## **PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES**

If a disaster occurred would you know what to do to protect yourself and your family? If you had to leave your home, would you have food, water and other supplies to last the three to four days it may take for emergency assistance to arrive?

No one likes to consider the possibility that disaster will strike but planning and preparing for one can be crucial to your survival. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes, as well as man-made events such as gas explosions, happen quickly and often without warning. Buildings are damaged or destroyed in a matter of seconds and along with them lives, homes and possessions.

Emergencies have a way of bringing people together; your knowledge and preparedness can be a lifesaver for your family, your neighbours and others.

### **People with Special Needs**

1. People who have hearing impairments may need to make special arrangements to receive a warning. If you have a hearing impaired neighbour, you may wish to ask about how you may be of assistance in case of an emergency.
2. Those who are mobility impaired may need assistance in getting to a shelter.
3. People with special dietary needs should have an adequate emergency food supply.
4. Find out about special assistance that may be available in your community. Register with the fire department so help can be provided in an emergency.

### **Medication**

If you or anyone in your family requires medication, keep a two-week supply in your emergency kit. Make note of the expiry date of the medication in your calendar and replace it with new supplies as needed.

### **Pets**

Pets are loyal companions who, unfortunately, cannot fend for themselves in an emergency. They cannot open doors to escape to safety. Animal shelters and pet stores sell stickers for your doors and windows that let emergency response personnel know that you have pets inside.

### **Utilities**

Do you know how to shut off utilities? In a flood, electricity can be deadly. A gas leak can be poisonous and a fire hazard. A water leak can damage your home and make it uninhabitable. Be prepared by knowing where the main shutoff valves and switches are before an emergency happens.

## *Gas*

Locate the main gas shutoff (usually outside the house) and all pilot lights. Clear the area around the shutoff valve for quick and easy access in case of emergency.

## *Electrical*

Locate the main electrical shutoff. Your house may be equipped with fuses or circuit breakers. If your house has fuses, you will find a handle that should be marked "MAIN." If your house has circuit breakers, you may need to open the metal door of the breaker box to reveal the circuit breakers. The main circuit breakers should be clearly marked showing on and off positions.

## *Water*

Locate the main water pipe into your house (if you cannot locate it contact your utility company). Look for a "gate valve" on the pipe. If water pipes are leaking inside your home, this valve will shut off the water supply. You may wish to paint the valve so it is easy to find in an emergency.

## **Emergency Kits**

In the case of a widespread disaster such as an earthquake, emergency response units (fire department, ambulance and police) may not be able to reach you immediately. In fact, you may be without food and shelter for days. In case of injury, you should be prepared to provide first aid.

Ideally, every family should have a disaster supply kit containing water, food and supplies to last for at least three days. This kit should be kept in a designated place and be ready to "grab and go" in case you have to leave your home quickly. Make sure all household members know where the kit is kept.

Food and water should be sealed in the manufacturers' packaging so that air and moisture do not spoil the contents. Be sure that all packaging can be opened by hand without a can or bottle opener. Keep track of the expiry dates. Put your entire emergency supply kit in one or two backpacks or plastic pails.

Kits should contain:

1. A 3-4 day supply of bottled water (at least one litre per person per day)
2. Water purification tables
3. Rain jackets
4. Blankets
5. A 3-4 day supply of energy bars, nuts and dried fruit. These foods are high in calories and protein relative to their size and weight making them portable.  
Bottled or boxed juices

6. Bottled or boxed juices
7. Flashlight (be sure to check the batteries regularly)
8. First-aid kit \* (see below)
9. Tools (including a knife or scissors)
10. Whistle
11. Waterproof matches
12. First aid manual
13. Sterile adhesive bandages in assorted sizes
14. Assorted sizes of safety pins
15. Cleansing agents (isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide)/soap/germicide
16. Antibiotic ointment
17. Latex gloves
18. 2-inch and 4-inch sterile gauze pads (4-6 each size)
19. Triangular bandages (3)
20. 2-inch and 3-inch sterile roller bandages (3 rolls each)
21. Cotton balls
22. Scissors
23. Tweezers
24. Needle and sterile thread
25. Antiseptic

### **Create an Emergency Plan**

Preparation is the best way to avoid unnecessary stress and panic during a stressful event. Talk to your children about what to do in an emergency. Do a practice drill including important steps such as finding a safe exit from your home, grabbing the emergency kit and ensuring everyone is out of the building. Repeat the practice on a regular basis (at least once a year so that people will automatically remember what to do). Choose a place where everyone will meet such as relative's home in case family members become separated.

Being prepared for a disaster takes very little time and money and the return on your investment is priceless.

## **THE "HOME HUNTERS"**

**Grant & Steve Hunter**