

❖ During the winter months the most important thing to prevent burglary is to make your home look as if it's occupied. As it gets dark at around 3.30pm when many people are at work, the use of lights on timer switches is recommended and if you can, also put one on a radio tuned to a talk station which makes it sound like someone is in, and having a conversation. Fake TV lights are now available, which gives the impression that someone is watching television, and these can work really well if you have them in an upstairs bedroom.

❖ Ensure that all doors and windows are closed and properly locked – use a key, don't just lift the door handle. Take the keys out of the door when it's locked and put them somewhere out of sight and reach, but make sure all the residents know where they are kept in case of emergency.

❖ Sheds, garages and outbuildings are popular targets for burglars, so increase the security to these whenever possible. Check that the contents are included on your home and contents insurance.

❖ Restrict access to the rear of your property wherever possible – lock any side gates leading to the rear – as the back or patio doors are the most popular site of forced entry. Think about growing some thorny bushes along the garden fencing.

❖ Install security lighting which not only helps you see where you're going, it also warns you and your neighbours that someone is in the area.

❖ Consider installing a burglar alarm – they are a real deterrent – but get an approved or recommended model, as the cheap ones aren't really that reliable and if the alarm keeps going off your neighbours will soon lose interest and may ignore a real activation.

Spot Quiz: Which is the unoccupied house (and the burglar's choice)?

