HOME SECURITY

How retired firefighter John Gignac is using personal loss to keep you and your family safe

Protecting what's precious

Carbon monoxide
Ways to detect and avoid the silent killer

The lock lowdown
Determine the right one for your security needs

No cause for alarm
What you can do to prevent false alarms

3 TIPS

To keep the most vulnerable in your home safe

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PHOTO: PRIVATE
Home is where we feel safest, but complacency can lull one into a false sense of security. In order to protect those most vulnerable, it’s important to recognize the threats—inside and out.

Deter home robbery with extra care

Education and awareness of preventive techniques can help you recognize a potential crime situation and show you how to reduce or remove the risk.

Becoming involved in your community and getting to know your local police can increase your sense of security. Your participation can also enhance programs and services available to your community.

Most people feel very safe in their homes however, many Canadians fail to take even fundamental precautions to secure their homes against robbery.

There are a number of precautions you can take that will reduce the opportunity that burglars are looking for including:

- Conduct a security check of your home to determine possible entry points and any weaknesses they may have.
- Keep all entrances and garages well-lit at night.
- Do not leave tell-tale signs that you are away.
- Install good lock and always use them.
- Install a dead-bolt in your front door which allows you to see visitors before you open the door.
- Never open a door to strangers without credentials.
- Change your routine often. Burglars often monitor activities in a neighborhood.
- Do not keep large amounts of money in your home.
- Mark valuable items for identification. The Operation Identification program has been developed by police to assist people in marking their property.

It is important to take extra care in securing your home when you are going to be away for any extended time. Not only should your home be secure, but it should also appear lived in.

- Lock all windows, doors and the garage before you leave.
- Leave a radio playing to indicate that someone is home.
- Leave one or two lights on, preferably operated by timers that turn on according to how dark it is.
- Discontinue mail and newspaper deliveries.
- Arrange to have someone pick up any newspapers, mail or flyers that are left on your step.
- Arrange to have someone pick up deliveries.
- Be on guard.
- Always be especially cautious if you are in more than one person at your door.

Demand identification at the door. Carefully check the identification and, if in doubt, DO NOT LET THEM IN.

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Be misleading.

A few inexpensive but rich-looking pieces kept in the jewellry box as a dummy are likely to deter criminals from further damaging your home in search of valuables.

To learn more about CANASA and find a security professional in your area, visit canasa.ca.

Deter home robbery with extra care
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CO poisoning took John Gignac’s loved ones, suddenly and without warning. Now, the retired firefighter is pushing to make CO detectors mandatory—and to spread awareness.

As the leading cause of poisonous deaths in North America, carbon monoxide is considered “The Silent Killer” because of how deadly it can be without anyone even noticing.

For retired firefighter John Gignac, losing his niece, her husband and their two kids to carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning was a harrowing ordeal he didn’t wish on anyone. What made it all the more heartbreaking was that their lives could’ve been saved had there been a CO detector in the house to prevent it.

“They had turned the fireplace up one night, but because the vents were blocked up to 80 percent, it pushed all the carbon monoxide back into the house and poisoned the family,” Gignac says, recounting the terrible tragedy. “‘The investigation found that they had been exposed to carbon monoxide for a period of time—and CO is cumulative—so when they encouraged it that night, they already had a buildup of CO in their bodies at the time.’

“I was there, Laurie, managed to fight for her life for eight days after the incident until she succumbed, through Gignac says doctors can’t explain how she was able to survive that long with so much CO in her body. A week prior to the incident, she had taken her kids to see the family doctor because of flu-like symptoms—which are now attributed to the level of CO in the home.

Preventive health signs can mislead

Flu-like symptoms in the home have been proven to be a consequence of exposure to CO, but it’s hard to know for sure unless a CO detector is installed. Unlike smoke, which is caused by combustion and can be seen and smelled, carbon monoxide is odorless, tasteless and invisible, Gignac says.

“The only proven way to protect yourself and your family from carbon monoxide is to get a detector,” Gignac says. “Children and seniors have diminished lung capacity because their lungs can’t cope with a large volume of oxygen, so it would take less gas to affect them. We need to get these detectors in retirement homes and schools as well.”

Given the silence of CO, a lot of poisoning incidents happen at night when people are sleeping and most susceptible to the gas. “People can go to sleep and never wake up because of this, so we’re really looking to raise awareness of the issue so we can save lives,” he says.

Making some noise

Gignac adds that he doesn’t just educate people on how CO is created, how it affects them and how they can protect themselves; he also educates them on the proper use of CO detectors. Through his charitable Hawkins-Gignac Foundation for CO Education, plus its website, EndtheSilence.org, Gignac says he has devoted his time to helping raise awareness for the issue.

“Less than 60 percent of Ontario households have CO detectors,” Gignac says. “You want to make your home energy efficient by sealing it off to keep the cold air from coming in, but then your home isn’t breathing, so the gas could build up quicker and, without a detector, you will never know.”

Make it mandatory

On top of talking to kids in schools, seniors in retirement homes and anyone in between, Gignac has also joined a coalition in taking his message to Queen’s Park. On the second anniversary of his family’s tragic passing, he spoke to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and MPPs in the House of Commons, and pleaded with them to pass Bill 69, which would make CO detectors mandatory in Ontario residences.

“The only way to get all Ontarians to put CO detectors in their home is to legislate it,” Gignac says. “People can go to sleep and never wake up because of this, so we’re really looking to raise awareness of the issue so we can save lives.”

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Question: With the barrage of lock types and options available to consumers, how can you determine what best suits your security needs?
Answer: It’s important to understand what type of lock is suitable for each structure and potential weather conditions.

Get the lowdown on the right lock for your home

Don’t miss:

Tips for parents: when your child is home alone

Phone
- Give important numbers beside each telephone and/or program them in.
- Equip your phone with an answering device or service so it can take messages.
- Buy a phone with caller ID. Tell your child to answer the phone only for specific callers. Let the phone take a message for all others.
- Install a wireless home monitoring system that will alert you when your child returns home. Instruct those to alert your cell phone, office phone, blackberry or email. A video camera can provide an extra layer of security so you can be aware even when you are not there.

Security
- Provide secure locks for all doors and windows.
- Store matches, lighter, medications, household cleaner and other toxic substances in a safe place. Make sure they are closely labeled and in their original containers.
- Lock up alcoholic beverages, and check to make sure they do not mysteriously disappear.
- Store firearms and ammunition separately and under lock and key.
- Use light timers so your child doesn’t come home to a dark house.

Fire safety
- You must have a smoke alarm on each level of the house (or for homes on one level, near the kitchen and all bedrooms). Test them to make sure they work.
- Replace any broken electrical cords and use no more than two plugs per outlet.
- Keep your hot water heater below 54 C to prevent scalding.

First aid
- Assemble a basic kit with your child, explaining what each item is and how to use it. Include:
  - A box of diff erent-sized bandages for small cuts;
  - Tweezers to remove slivers;
  - Small scissors to cut the tape;
  - Sterile gauze pad for larger cuts;
  - Antibacterial ointments for small cuts;
  - A box of diff erent-sized bandages;
  - Extra batteries (or an extra cord and use no more than two plugs per outlet.

Power outages
- Keep a flashlight or two (and extra batteries) handy.
- Provide a few items that can run on batteries, e.g. radio, clock, electronic games.

Get ready: you may be home alone

Determined the fourth key to CO safety is to install a smoke alarm in your home, and to check and maintain it regularly. If you need a burglary system, like mortise or padlock locks, and those require an experi-
enced technician.

Lock it down

For added safety, buying and installing a safe in your home might make a big difference in pro-
tecting valuables from home intru-
sion or even a fire. Since location
and placement are critical, a pro-
fessional can help determine the
most secure location, while also
considering things like weight,
dimensions and protrusions like
hinges and the dial, Kischak says.

“What you store in a safe de-
termines the type you need,” he says.
“Fire ratings really apply to bank
vault safes, while fire safes offer
a humid environment that can be
detrimental to storing some mate-
rials, so they should be rated out.
If you need a burglary safe or for
the best quality and have it profes-
sionally installed.”

“Security and convenience are usu-
ally mutually exclusive, but you
can determine your security and
access needs by seeking pro-
fessional advice on how to meet
them,” he says.

“Locksmiths can educate on
the proper locks for your resi-
dence including those locks not
found at hardware stores,” Kischak
says. “Certain locks can be tricky to
install, like mortise or padlock
locks. These are a professional
service and should be left to a pro-
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Reducing false alarms is an important step in helping to ensure that emergency response teams are available to respond to true emergencies when you or your family need help the most.

If you, or those you care for, use a security system in the home, here are a few tips on how to reduce false alarms and make the best use of the system.

- Ask for Enhanced Call Verification and provide multiple contacts:

With A.P.I.’s LifeSentry* system, you’ll receive emergency response help, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week!

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**Fire safety tips for seniors**

The two leading causes of fire deaths and injuries among older adults are smoking materials and the misuse of portable space heaters.

**Tips to remember**

- Smokers should have a designated area away from updrafted materials, such as the kitchen table.
- Never smoke in bed while sleeping— it is too easy to fall asleep and great materials are highly flammable.
- Sleep with the bedroom door closed and provide more time to escape from a fire-occur.
- Keep space heaters well-ventilated and at least three feet away from flammable materials.
- Unplug space heaters when not in use.
- Extension cords are for temporary use only and should not be used with a space heater or electric blanket.
- Never run a space heater under a carpet or rug.

**Smoke alarms**

- Smoke alarms are inexpensive and easy to install. For assistance with the location and installation of smoke alarms, call your local fire department and visit our “Smoke alarms” fact sheet.

- Ensure there is a working smoke alarm on every floor of the home and outside every sleeping area.
- Have a friend or relative test your smoke alarm while you are asleep so you can hear it.
- Once a month, test the battery by pushing the test button and drift smoke from a small candle into the alarm.
- Change the battery, open the smoke, cover the vacancy and burn without the door or window intact.

**Smoke escape planning saves lives**

- Develop and practice a fire escape plan. Be sure to include all hallways and stairs.

- Ensure smoke alarms are working. If your home is clear, close the door and never go back into a burning building.

- Crawl low near the floor to the nearest exit and maintain contact with the wall.
- Exit the door by finding it with the back of your hand. If it is hot, do not open. Use an alternate route.
- If the door is itself, cool down with your shoulder against the door while opening it slowly and be ready to close the door if smoke and heat enter the room.
- If trapped, put as many closed doors between you and the fire as possible.

- **TIPS**
  - People usually die in fires because of inhalation of smoke and toxic gases.
  - Fire prevention is focused on fire protection and education, states that as many as 90% of Canadian home fires begin in the kitchen.
  - Fire prevention efforts are aimed at reducing false signals and preventing fires. This is why families with children and the elderly tend to be the most interested in monitoring services, where reacting quickly and decisively is so crucial.
  - We can’t always smell a fire in our sleep, and we can’t do anything when we’re not home, as an extra level of protection is worth it if it saves even one life,” he says.

- **New smoke detectors**
  - New smoke detectors in schools are considered much more effective at alerting someone when something is wrong.
  - Fire and家居 is the “silent killer.”
  - It’s with these stats in mind that Fire Prevention Canada, a non-profit organization focused on fire prevention and education, states that as many as 90% of all smoke-related incidents.
  - Residential fire losses for 2011 for 9% of those deaths.
  - With its state in mind that home security experts are looking to help Canadians not only protect their homes and families but ensure they won’t aff ect the alarm system.

- **New pets that enter an armed room**
  - New pets that enter an armed room or accidently set off .

- **New smoke detectors**
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  - If trapped, put as many closed doors between you and the fire as possible.
  - If your clothing catches fire, stop what you are doing, drop to the ground and smother the fire with clothing or a wet blanket. Do not use a fire extinguisher.
  - Cold minor burns with cold water.

**Protect yourself from silent killers**

- Carbon Dioxide
- Fire
- Burglary

- Time is of the essence
- People usually die in fires because of inhalation of smoke and toxic gases,”

- If you have evidence like symptoms, like dizziness and nausea, they might be signs that you’re about to be intoxicated with carbon monoxide.

- If a fire breaks out in your home, it’s always better to call 911 from the alarm. Have a working smoke detector. Be sure to include all hallways and stairs.

- To be careful of service providers who use high pressure techniques to sell their system and force you to make a decision on the spot. Do not accept this pressure. Be sure to control your emotions and make a decision without haste.

- If the alarm is activated, do not try to reset it.

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- Once a month, test the battery by pushing the test button and drift smoke from a small candle into the alarm.

- Change the battery, open the smoke, cover the vacancy and burn without the door or window intact.

- In case of fire—GET OUT AND STAY OUT—never go back into a burning building.

- Crawl low near the floor to the nearest exit and maintain contact with the wall.

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**Save cause for alarm for true emergencies**

- Reducing false alarms is an important step in helping to ensure that emergency response teams are available to respond to true emergencies when you or your family need help the most.

- If you, or others you care for, use security systems in the home, there are a few tips on how to reduce false alarms and make the best use of the system.

- **Ask for Enhanced Call Verification and provide multiple contacts**
  - Enhanced Call Verification for burglar alarms means that your monitoring company will try to get in touch with two or more contacts to confirm an alarm’s validity before issuing a dispatch. According to the False Alarm Reduction Association, communities that require Enhanced Call Verification have seen law enforcement response to false alarms reduced by 40 to 60 percent.

- **Maintain “call lists”**
  - Keeping the “call list” up to date for personal and security alarm systems is extremely important. Ensure that your contact information is correct and be prepared to respond to alarm-related calls for those you provide in for.

- With the right information, monitoring stations can be proactive in determining an emergency response service should be dispatched.

- **Schedule annual inspections**
  - Request annual maintenance inspections to ensure proper performance of the alarm system. Also, don’t forget to have the battery replaced every three to five years.

- **Properly train users**
  - Ensures all end-users, including senior users and caretakers, are trained in the proper use of the alarm system and know the pass code and monitoring station’s number in case an alarm is accidentally set off.

- **Monitor changes in the home**
  - Contact your alarm company to re-ensure they won’t affect the alarm system. Now put that into a plan.

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