



Safety Reminder from Your Security Committee

Security Tip #29: Periodic Personal and Home Security Assessments

Keep in mind that judicial security is not one dimensional—it includes not only the courthouse, but also a judge’s residence and aspects of their personal life. Some of the most serious incidents involving assaults on judges and their families occurred at or near their residence. Investigations have revealed that many assailants carefully evaluate their target’s residence in assessing the vulnerability of that individual. Your Security Committee strongly recommends that judges periodically request the U.S. Marshals Service to conduct a residential security survey on their home. To facilitate the survey, judges should update the information on the USM-50 form, “Judicial Personnel Profile.”

The survey will focus on points of vulnerability such as doors, windows, locks, lighting, alarm systems, and shrubbery. Judicial security inspectors will also assist in the development of a security strategy, which is particularly important if there are young children in the household.

There are three primary objectives of home and outer perimeter security—deter, detect, and delay. Externally, shrubs should be trimmed in a manner that allows a clear line of visibility. Motion-activated lighting enhances visibility of trees and shrubs and is strongly recommended. Sound locks, sturdy doors, and functioning alarm systems are

critical. Alarm panels should not be visible from windows as it would allow an intruder to observe if the alarm system is activated. Regular use of home alarm systems is strongly encouraged.

To provide an enhanced level of protection, the FJA and the Judicial Conference Committee on Security are actively supporting congressional funding to upgrade and replace current home alarm devices with state-of-the-art systems. These systems should include doorbell/camera devices, which allow occupants to view and speak to individuals outside without opening doors. If the system is Wi-Fi connected, it should be password protected.

History has taught that windows are among the greatest points of vulnerability in the home. Windows should be immobilized by a secure latch or lock. Many burglary investigators recommend inserting a pin or nail in the frame of the sliding section of windows to enhance security. Double-plated glass requiring multiple blows to shatter is also advisable.

To prevent forceable entry by prying, doors should be flush with the frame. Bolts of door locks should penetrate at least an inch into the frame itself. Sliding glass doors should be immobilized with a broom handle or a section of dowel. Reportedly, a significant number of convicted residential burglars contend that one of the most effective deterrents is the presence of a large dog water bowl near the doorway.

A judge’s security also requires a guarded personal profile. To the extent possible, judges should avoid public disclosure of their home address. This may entail rental of a Post Office box for personal mail. Many counties, cities, and states allow public officials to list a Post Office box in lieu of a street address on public documents. It is also wise to have all nonpersonal mail and packages sent to the courthouse address to enhance privacy and enable screening.

Family members should be cautioned not to publish personally identifiable information, such as photos of the judge, their residence or vehicle, on the Internet and social media websites. If you use social media, be sure to check the privacy settings. “Preemptive individual efforts by judicial officials . . . to limit their Internet footprint may assist in thwarting potential threats or efforts to gather personal information for criminal purposes.” (National Center for Judicial Security Information Bulletin, July 13, 2016.)

To obtain a detailed residential security survey, or personal security advice, judges should contact the judicial security inspector serving their district.

Security Committee
Federal Judges Association

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