

ON THE HOUSE



Fall-Winter Home Safety and Security

by James Carey and Morris Carey

Fall and winter mean shorter days, colder weather, and less natural light to safely traverse paths outdoors and hallways indoors. The change in seasons also ushers in the need to fire up the furnace and/or stoke the fireplace or wood stove.

With reduced natural light and furnace and fireplace operation come a host of safety and security hazards, such as nasty falls, home burglaries, increased fire danger and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. There are, however, several simple and inexpensive upgrades that will improve safety and security and, as a bonus, improve comfort and energy efficiency.

A poorly lighted path is an accident waiting to happen -- especially when one is burdened with an armful of groceries or packages. Solve the problem by installing landscape lighting. Also called **accent and patio lighting**, these low-voltage systems are more affordable, energy-efficient and easier to install than ever. Although elements can be purchased piecemeal, most manufacturers offer a kit that contains everything needed to brighten up the exterior of your home -- wire, transformer and fixtures. Besides improving path safety, these systems are a means of lighting dark, bushy areas that could serve as a hide-out for an intruder.

While landscape lighting contributes to the safety and security of a home, it does have its limitations. Where more lighting "horsepower" is needed, such as at the front porch, driveway or a poorly lighted side or rear yard, consider **motion-activated lighting**. This type of light fixture turns on when a sensor detects motion -- a feature that protects against intruders.

When motion-activated lighting first became popular, it was, for the most part, limited to a standard **utility spot** or **floodlight**. Today, **decorative lantern-style fixtures** automatically light up otherwise dark porches and patios. A **motion-activated sensor** also can be retrofitted to most existing light fixtures. As with landscape lighting, motion-activated lighting is affordable and easy to install.

If you have a large area that requires much light and you want to accomplish it with a single fixture, a **high-pressure sodium** or **mercury security light** will do the trick. These fixtures pack a lighting punch. For example, a 70-watt sodium security light will illuminate more than 8,500 square feet; provide 6,300 lumens of light and last up to 12 times longer than a standard incandescent par floodlight. Add a built-in photo control and the light will automatically turn on at dusk and turn off at dawn with no timers or switches.

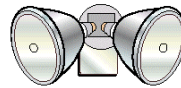
Lighting upgrades shouldn't be limited to the exterior. You can improve safety and discourage prowlers by installing motion-activated lighting and timers inside, as well. For example, a **motion-activated light switch** can come in handy when you travel through a dark hallway with an armful of laundry.

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Home safety & security

Here are some simple and inexpensive upgrades that will improve the safety and security of your home.

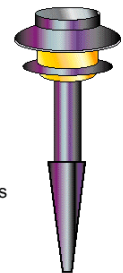
Motion-activated floodlight



Protect yourself against intruders with a motion-activated floodlight.

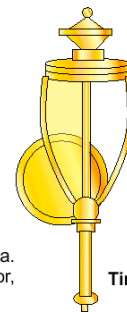
Landscape Light

A poorly lit path is an accident waiting to happen. Place along walks, steps, shrubbery or wherever small amounts of lighting is needed.

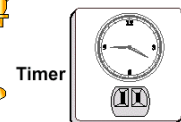


Carbon monoxide detector

Carbon monoxide is the number-one cause of poisoning deaths in America. A CO detector is as easy or, in some cases, easier to install than a smoke detector.



Motion activated lanterns are a nice touch to your outside decor as well as a great safety precaution around the home.



Timer

A plug-in timer for a table lamp can be used to create the illusion of an occupied home and keep would-be intruders away.



Smoke detectors

Smoke detectors that are over 10 years old, have a high rate of failure and should be replaced. Check operation monthly and change batteries at least twice annually.

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Timers are still another means of improving safety, security and comfort. A standard wall switch can be replaced with a **digital timer** that will turn interior or exterior lighting off at predetermined times. What's more, this style of switch will allow for random settings that give your home a lived-in look while you are away. A **plug-in timer** for a table lamp can also create the illusion of an occupied home and keep would-be intruders away. Timers are inexpensive and easy to install.

Besides providing improved safety and security, motion-activated switches and timers are highly energy efficient - especially if you have youngsters who frequently forget to turn lights off.

There are other ways of upgrading the safety of your home during fall and winter. Where there's smoke, there's fire -- and carbon monoxide. This slightly altered familiar phrase is particularly applicable during fall and winter when home fires increase due to fireplaces and home heating systems being at maximum use. Every home and family should be protected by one or more properly operating **smoke detectors and carbon-monoxide detectors**.

Many years ago building code required only one smoke detector in a home. Today, a smoke detector is required in each bedroom and on every level of a home. A carbon-monoxide detector is not a requirement, though the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends that every home with fuel-burning appliances -- including fireplaces -- be equipped with at least one.

Your Checklist!

- Accent and patio lighting
- Motion-activated lighting
- Utility spot or floodlight
- Decorative lantern-style fixtures
- Motion-activated sensor
- High-pressure sodium or mercury security light
- Motion-activated light switch
- Timers (digital timer, plug-in timer)
- Smoke detectors
- Carbon-monoxide detectors
- Screwdriver
- Ladder
- Batteries
- Combination smoke and CO

If your home doesn't have smoke detectors, install them. If you have only one, such as in a hallway, install others in all bedrooms and in a central location on every floor of your home. A smoke detector is inexpensive and easy to install. A **screwdriver, ladder** and 15 minutes is about all you'll need. The same holds true for carbon-monoxide detectors.

You can have a dozen smoke detectors and still end up with little or no protection. Recent studies have revealed that smoke detectors that are 10 years old, or older, have a high rate of failure and should be replaced.

A poorly maintained or dirty smoke detector is useless. Use a vacuum with an upholstery brush to prevent dust and dirt from building up in the mechanism. Test the device's detector and alarm monthly to ensure that they both are working properly. The test button on the detector tests the alarm only. Striking three wooden kitchen matches, blowing them out and allowing the smoke to waft up toward the unit will test the detector. Another means of testing a detector is with an aerosol spray that simulates smoke. Change **batteries** at least twice annually, and more often, if necessary.

Carbon monoxide is the number-one cause of poisoning deaths in America. A CO detector is as easy or, in some cases, easier to install than a smoke detector. It can be battery operated, hardwired, permanently installed or can sit on a shelf or tabletop.

You can have the best of both worlds, and maximum protection, by installing a **combination smoke and CO alarm**. Relatively new to the market, this combo device looks essentially like a smoke detector, but does the job of both. Some models go beyond the standard alarm by offering a voice warning of fire or CO danger.

Dollar for dollar, home safety and security upgrades lend the best bang for your home improvement buck -- not to mention the peace of mind you'll enjoy.

Morris and James Carey are nationally recognized experts on home building and renovation. They share their nearly half-century of experience as award-winning licensed contractors with millions of people nationwide through weekly radio programming and a syndicated newspaper column both titled "On The House." Visit their web site at www.onthehouse.com for more home improvement tips and information.

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