

You're proud of the state-of-the-art stereo system you brought to your college dorm. And the computer. And the VCR. But you're also worried that someone is going to make off with them when you're not around.

Why invite theft? Some simple precautions can foil would-be thieves and reduce your anxiety.

Common sense is the best security device, says Robert Stolle of the Northwestern University Public Safety Department in Evanston, Illinois. He offers these tips for dorm safety:

- ☐ When leaving a room, even for a few minutes to talk to a friend, lock the door.
- ☐ When leaving your room for the day, make sure all windows are closed and locked and valuable items are stowed out of sight.
- ☐ Report any locks, doors, or windows needing repair, or any lost keys to your resident hall adviser as soon as possible.
- ☐ Have someone check student IDs as people enter a party (to deter unwelcome outsiders).

Campus housing regulations may prohibit dorm dwellers from installing extra locks or bolting down electronic equipment. But you can improve dorm security without breaking rules.

Moderately priced cable security systems sold at computer stores can adequately protect your PC, stereo, and TV without damaging your room or furniture. One system secures equipment this way: a steel cable passes through special fasteners attached to existing screws to prevent removal; the cable is wound around a desk or table and locked.

For more high-tech protection, you may want to use a computerized alarm; it's activated by turning a key-switch, and the alarm sounds when your equipment is moved.

Off-campus apartment dwellers have other security options. Officer Michael Shep of the Evanston Police Department Crime Preven-

tion Unit suggests supplementing standard doorknob locks with:

- ☐ A dead-bolt lock. The best dead bolts have a 1-inch metal throw (the bolt's length when fully extended into the door frame). These locks are tough to pry off,

Come On In and Steal My Stuff

drill, pick, or open without a key.

- ☐ Double cylinder locks, if there is glass in the door.

These locks feature a removable key on the inside. They prevent a thief from breaking the glass to reach in and turn the knob. Remove the key from the lock when you're not home.

- ☐ Window locks. Locks for standard double-hung windows are notoriously easy to force open. Bolster them with key-operated window locks, available at hardware stores. Or, you can make your own simple window locks: drill holes at a downward angle through both sides of the inner window frame and about halfway through the outer frame; insert nails through the holes. This will make it impossible for would-be burglars to pry open the window.

What other precautions can you take?

Shep recommends that you engrave your driver's license number (with the state in parentheses beside it) in a visible place on your electronic equipment. Thieves tend to shy away from engraved goods because they know these items can

be easily identified as stolen, and traced by police.

Keep an updated inventory of your possessions. A detailed list of your belongings is useful in letting the insurance company and the police know what you owned and how to identify it. A good inventory contains:

- ☐ a written description of possessions, including special marks, serial numbers, model names, and special engraving
- ☐ the date the items were acquired and their original cost
- ☐ purchase receipts
- ☐ snapshots or videotapes of items

Bill Sirola of the Insurance Information Institute recommends that you keep two inventory copies: one in a safe place at your residence, and the other with your parents or other relatives.

Precautions help, but the best insurance against theft is still a safety-conscious attitude. So plan ahead, exercise your common sense, and enjoy your valuables a whole lot longer.

