

U.S. EMBASSY, ACCRA, AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES NEWSLETTER

INCREASED CRIME IN ACCRA

Recently, a warden message was issued to alert U.S. citizens of an increased in crime in Accra, including armed robberies and burglaries of residences in the East Legon and Airport Residential neighborhoods. This crime has affected both local citizens and expatriates.

In East Legon, armed criminals appear to be targeting the residences of expatriates. Typically these criminals park their vehicles in the neighborhood to observe the movement patterns of an intended victim. The criminals lie in wait for the victim to enter the targeted residence at an opportune time, normally after dark. The criminals then brandish weapons and force their way in. The criminals have stolen computers, electronics, jewelry, cash and other items of value.

The trend in the Airport Residential area involves armed criminals using a motorcycle to rob pedestrians or joggers. Electronics, jewelry and cash appear to be the targeted items.

The U.S. Embassy recommends that all U.S. citizens practice vigilant personal security habits, including the following:

- ◆ Vary your schedules and routes to avoid predictability;
- ◆ Observe your neighborhood for suspicious vehicles;
- ◆ Drive to the nearest police station if you suspect that you are being followed and report it. Do NOT go to the intended residence;
- ◆ Instruct your domestic staff to be vigilant about visitors accessing your residence;
- ◆ Do NOT resist if an armed criminal confronts you.

If you are the victim of a crime, immediately contact the Ghana Police for assistance. Then notify the U.S. Embassy American Citizen Services Unit.

This information is provided by the American Citizen Services Unit, U.S. Embassy Accra, Ghana; Telephone: 021-741-000, 021-741-449/443/071; Fax: 021-

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SAFETY ON THE STREET

Use the same common sense traveling overseas that you would at home. Be especially cautious in (or avoid) areas where you may be more easily victimized; these include crowded Tro-Tro/Taxi stations and bus stations, elevators, tourist sites, market places, festivals and crime-ridden neighborhoods.

- Don't use short cuts, narrow alleys or poorly lit streets.
- Try not to travel alone at night.
- Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances.
- Keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations or arguments.
- Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers.

Avoid scam artists by being wary of strangers who approach you and offer to be your guide or sell you something at bargain prices.

Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will:

- jostle you,

- ask you for directions or the time,
- point to something spilled on your clothing, or distract you by creating a disturbance.

Beware of groups of vagrant children who create a distraction while picking your pocket.

Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse-snatchers.

Try to seem purposeful when you move about. Even if you are lost, act as if you know where you are going. Try to ask for directions only from individuals in authority.

Know how to use a pay telephone and have the proper change or token on hand.

Learn a few phrases in the local language or have them handy in written form so that you can signal your need for police or medical help.

Make a note of emergency telephone numbers you may need: police, fire, your hotel, and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

If you are confronted, don't fight back—give up your valuables.

SAFETY IN YOUR HOTEL

Keep your hotel door locked at all times. Meet visitors in the lobby.

Do not leave money and other valuables in your hotel room while you are out. Use the hotel safe.

If you are out late at night, let someone know when you expect to return.

If you are alone, do not get on an elevator

if there is a suspicious-looking person inside.

Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room. Know how to report a fire, and be sure you know where the nearest fire exits and alternate exits are located (count the doors between your room and the nearest exit; this could be a lifesaver if you have to crawl through a smoke-filled corridor).

RESIDENTIAL SECURITY TIPS

Know your neighborhood:

Make an effort to familiarize yourself with your neighborhood. Walk around the neighborhood and drive around the area to get a good idea of where you are located. Note the layout of the streets. Make a mental note of one-way streets. Drive around at night.

Streets and buildings look much different in the dark with artificial light.

Get acquainted with at least one neighbor as quickly as possible. You may need a neighbor in an emergency or for a temporary "safe haven" in the event of a burglary or other type of incident.

Learn the location of the nearest hospital and police station. Drive the route to the hospital in daylight and at night. Go directly to the Emergency Room entrance so no time is lost if you really have to use the facility. Check on traffic conditions during rush hours and at other times. Determine how long it will take you to reach the hospital at various times during day and at night.

Install Security Lighting:

Residence security lighting should be sufficient to illuminate the entrance to the home and the surrounding area. Lighting should be placed in such a manner that it covers the walls of the residence and the ground area adjacent to the perimeter walls. Also, it should illuminate shrubbery and eliminate building blind spots. At the very least it should suffice to deter someone from lurking undetected in adjacent areas. Also, you should make sure that there are no trees or shrubbery on the grounds which provide cover for a clandestine approach and concealment.

Access Routes:

Statistics have shown that the vast majority of crimes occur close to the victim's residence and occur when the victim is leaving or re-

turning home. It is essential that access routes to and from your residence provide sufficient alternatives which do not lock you into predictable patterns. Specifically, it is essential that dead-end streets or narrow one-way streets be avoided. If possible, your residence also should afford more than one point of entrance/exit.

Residence Safe Haven:

Consideration should be given to the creation of a safe haven in your residence. A safe haven is a place in the residence which can serve as an area where occupants may take refuge for short periods of time until help arrives. A basic requirement for a safe haven is that it be furnished with a substantial door equipped with a door viewer or with a grill gate. The door or gate should be equipped with a strong deadbolt lock. (NOTE: A "substantial" door is made of material which is strong enough to prevent someone from breaking through by kicking, throwing body weight against it, or striking it with a heavy item such as a rock or hammer. A door below this standard may suffice if it is used with a good quality grill gate.)

The safe haven area also should be equipped with reliable communications and accessible windows/openings should be secured against forced entry. Furthermore, a desirable feature would be to have the area afford a secondary means of escape. This could be an opening from which to reach the ground safely (not from a high upper floor) or to reach an unobservable intermediate location in the building such as a rear stairwell. (Secondary escape routes from areas with grilled windows/openings would, of course have to be in accordance with fire and safety regulations.)

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Lock Security:

Maintain strict key control on all exterior locks. Never hide an exterior door key outside the house. Remove all name identification from your gate and doors. Avoid displays which identify you as an American.

Doors, windows, and garages should be closed and locked at all times when the residents are away from home, no matter how short the time. If there is any doubt about accountability of keys to a home, have the locks replaced or re-pinned. Keys should be controlled and only given to mature family members or trusted friends. When domestic employees are given a key, it should only be to the primary lock of one entry door. They should never be given keys to both the primary and auxiliary locks. This ensures that the occupants can always secure the residence in the evenings or when the domestic staff is absent.

Any padlocks used for residential security should always be stored in the locked position. Sophisticated burglars sometimes will replace a padlock with a similar one to which they alone have the key.

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741-362/426; E-mail: acsaccra@state.gov; Website: <http://ghana.usembassy.gov>. For **emergency assistance** after hours, please contact the U.S. Embassy Duty Officer at 021-741-775.

VITAMIN SUPPLEMENTS

American Citizen Services would like to thank all American citizens and friends who donated vitamin supplements to the American prisoners. We appreciate your generosity and so do they.

U.S. Embassy, Accra, Ghana

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<http://ghana.usembassy.gov/service.html>

Upcoming Holidays:

May 1: May Day (G)
 May 25: African Union Day (G)
 May 25: Memorial Day (A)
 July 1: Republic Day (G)
 July 3: Independence Day (A)

G = Ghanaian

A = American

Subscribing/Unsubscribing

Anyone who wishes to sign up to receive this monthly ACS email newsletter and the periodic warden messages we send out can do so by completing the travel registration at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>