

Safe Smarts

Resources

Cleveland Safe Co.: 1636 St. Clair Ave., Cleveland. 216-566-9962.

Liberty Safe: www.libertysafe.com.

Sentry: www.sentrysafe.com.

Gardall: www.gardall.com.

American Security Products: www.amsecusa.com

Feeling the need for some homeland security of your own? A safe may be the answer.

Because safes are about worst-case scenarios — things like robbery and fire — we don't like to dwell too long on this necessity. But ignore it and we only hurt ourselves when Grandmother's earrings are stolen, or the deed to the house goes up in flames.

Most of the time, homeowners are looking at safes for fire protection, said Mark Brajdich, president of **Cleveland Safe Co.** They want to protect critical papers such as deeds and birth certificates.

Safes offer centralized storage as well as protection, said Joe Roxstrom, vice president of sales and marketing for Sentry. Knowing where important things are gives people peace of mind, he said. In the event of an evacuation, vital things like emergency cash and personal papers are in one place. And you can get to them anytime, unlike a safety deposit box.

Insurance companies may also offer discounts on policies to homeowners with safes.

Fire safes are the most basic, and usually the least expensive. The locks provide a measure of theft protection, but the main purpose is to protect items from fire. Safes are rated for the internal temperature reached. For example, a UL 350 safe — which is most fire safes that hold paper — protects papers by keeping the interior at 350 degrees. Paper begins to burn at 400 degrees. Safes are also rated for how long they can maintain a safe interior temperature, usually between 1 and 4 hours. The longer the temperature is maintained, the better the odds of your valuables and documents surviving a fire.

Paper will not come through a fire unscathed, even in a safe, Brajdich said. There will be some yellowing from the heat, and it may dry out a bit. But other than that, the paper should come through fine.

Safes designed for both fire and burglary protection are an upgrade from fire safes. They offer a stronger locking system, and often stronger doors.

Brajidich said the worst place to store a safe is in the master bedroom. It's the first place burglars go. And fires burn longer and hotter on the main and second floors. The best place? The basement. Safes can be bolted to the cement. Also, fires most often start above the basement. So the basement stays cooler and the contents are safer, longer.

If flooding is a concern, some safes are water-resistant. You can also further protect items from water by storing them in plastic containers, zipper-lock plastic bags, or vacuum-sealed bags.

Roxstrom said college students are beginning to use safes in their dorm rooms or apartments. This gives them a secure place to store electronic and technological equipment like DVD players, digital cameras, cell

phones, personal digital assistants and laptop computers, he explained. Having things locked up in a safe means they're less likely to "disappear" during a party or while the student is at class.

Electronic keypad locks are gaining popularity. Combination locks can be harder for older people to manipulate. The homeowner can also change the number on an electronic keypad lock, where a professional must be called in to change the combination on a combination lock.

Protection for media like computer disks is also getting consumer and industry attention as more and more business records and family photographs are stored on disks.

Disks need much more fire protection than a standard safe offers. The temperature in the safe cannot exceed 125 degrees or 85 percent humidity. Lockable media boxes offer the necessary temperature and humidity control for such disks and fit inside a regular safe. Brajdich sells used media boxes.

"Media is coming on like a barnburner," Roxstrom said in a phone interview from his company's Rochester, N.Y., headquarters. "With more interest in computer security, people are backing up important things on disk. This is going to be the next big wave for production and growth."

Safes start at around \$45 for a Sentry security chest with a key lock and a half-hour 350 degree fire rating, and can run into the thousands of dollars. A basic Gardall fire safe, with 2½-inch walls and a two-hour, 350 fire rating, will start around \$600, Brajdich said. Gun safes can run between \$700 and \$1,800.

Customers sometimes balk at the cost, he said, even though they want to protect thousands of dollars in cash and valuables, as well as priceless heirlooms and hard-to-replace papers.

"I tell them, what's the value of what you're putting in there?" he said.

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