

Over 86% of UT Austin students live off-campus and are faced with important safety decisions on a daily basis.

Whether you are looking for an apartment or have lived in off-campus housing for years, this guide offers advice to help you Live Safe.

TIPS FOR SAFER DAILY LIVING

You can do a lot to improve your safety while living in off-campus housing! For starters, recognize that you are now living on your own, and it is your personal responsibility to look out for your security. To help you do this, here are some tips for safer daily living.

- **Keep doors and windows locked at all times** (even when you are home). Insist your landlord repair any broken locks, windows, and doors immediately!
- **Always close window coverings at night and when you are not at home.** Hint: Hang blinds/curtains over every window, and if your front or back door contains a large window be sure to cover it with a curtain as well.
- **Never reveal to someone that you are alone** — either on the phone, or standing outside your door. When a visitor is outside your door, call out, “I’ll get it!” to create the appearance that other people are inside with you.

When Someone Is At Your Door

- **Always look through a peephole** or window to see who it is before you unlock the door.
- **If you do not recognize the visitor, ask them questions** through the door so they can identify themselves.
- **Demand all service/repair personnel show official identification**, and confirm with your landlord or roommates that someone actually placed a service order.
- **When in doubt, never let a stranger into your home.** If someone knocks on your door and asks to come in to simply use your phone, you may offer to make the call for them, but never let them inside.

General Safety

- **Check smoke detectors monthly to make sure they work.** If you don’t have smoke detectors, ask your landlord to install one, or check if you’re allowed to install one yourself. Every residence needs a smoke detector!
- **Know where the nearest fire extinguisher is located** in your apartment complex. If your residence is not equipped with a fire extinguisher, ask your landlord to provide one, or purchase one yourself.
- **Make sure ovens and stovetops are turned off after every use.** Double check if necessary. Simple mistakes like this are the most common cause of fire!
- **Have your keys ready before you reach the door**, especially at night.
- **Never leave your keys outside under a doormat**, in a hide-a-key, or any place accessible to a stranger.
- **If you lose your keys, have your landlord change your locks immediately.**
- **Make sure parking lots, garages, laundry rooms, stairwells, and hallways are well-lit.** If you notice a light out in a public area such as these, notify your landlord.

- **Avoid entering elevators with strangers.** When in an elevator with a stranger, stand by the control panel. If confronted in a threatening way, push the emergency alarm and all the floor buttons. Don’t press the stop button!

- **Remove your address from local telephone directories** and UT Directory Services, and only list your phone number with a first initial and last name. Label buzz-in call boxes and mail boxes at your residence with only your first initial and last name as well.

- **Never leave a note on your door or voicemail greeting implying you are not home.** Record a generic voicemail greeting — nothing that indicates your schedule, or states that you are away. A digitized message saying no one is available to take the call is your best bet.

- **Make it appear as though someone is always home.** Leave a low-wattage light and a radio or noisemaker turned on inside your residence at all times, to discourage burglars looking to vandalize an empty home.

- **Inscribe your valuables with your state-issued driver’s license/identification number.** Marking your property in this way makes it less valuable to potential burglars, and, if your property is stolen, inscription provides law enforcement proof of your ownership. UTPD provides free engraving services.

- **To prevent identity theft**, destroy credit card applications, credit-advance checks, and all other papers with your personal information on them before you throw them in the garbage.

- **Program the local police and fire departments’ numbers into your mobile phone** or post them by every home phone. Also, post/program emergency contact numbers; label these numbers ICE (In Case of Emergency). In the event of an emergency, officials will know whom to contact for important personal or medical information.

- **Get to know your neighbors.** This is an excellent way to build a sense of community, as well as an extra security system. (Although your safety is primarily your responsibility, when you bond with your neighbors, you gain allies who will be on the lookout for the safety of you and your property.)

- **Be a good citizen.** You represent The University of Texas at Austin even when you are not on campus, so you are responsible for being a good ambassador for UT through all of your work and social activities in the greater Austin community. In essence, by upholding safer living habits, like always having a designated driver, and reporting criminal activity to the authorities, you make Austin a safer place for you and everyone who lives there.

Going on vacation?

- **Temporarily stop delivery services, or have a friend collect your mail, until you return.** Also, if you have a front yard, mow the lawn before you leave. A pile of mail outside your home and an unkempt lawn are telltale signs you are not there.
- **Use a utility timer** to automatically turn lights and electronic devices on and off while you are gone. UTPD will loan you timers for free, or you can purchase them from supermarkets and home supply stores.
- **Store valuables out of sight, and/or locked away.** When you go home for the holidays, take your valuables (i.e. laptop, portable music players, and jewelry) with you.
- **Keep your bicycle indoors**, and remove all items from inside your car to discourage theft.
- **Let a neighbor know when you will be gone.** Ask them to watch for anything suspicious around your property, and give them a phone number where they can contact you in an emergency.
- **Call your local police and request they perform a “Vacation Check”** or “Close Patrol Check” while you are away.



APARTMENT HUNTER’S CHECKLIST

- Is the property in a safe neighborhood?**
To research crime rates of different Austin neighborhoods, go to the Austin Police Department’s Crime Prevention website to look up crime safety facts by zip code, or even apartment complex.
- Are address numbers clearly visible?**
This helps police, fire fighters, and EMS locate your residence in an emergency.
- Are public areas well lit?**
Whether you are standing in the parking lot or outside your front door, adequate lighting allows you to distinguish the facial expressions of someone standing 10 feet away at any time of day.
- Are parking spaces marked with apartment numbers?**
Unmarked parking spaces are best, because the presence/absence of a car is a clear indicator of whether someone is home. A vacant parking space labeled with its corresponding apartment number could lead to potential burglary of an empty home!
- Are shrubs and trees around the property well-maintained?**
Overgrown plant life provides a hiding place for potential intruders, so be particularly wary of shaggy shrubs in neighborhoods with high crime rates!
- What is the timeframe for completion of repair work?**
Talk to current residents about their experiences requesting repairs... Remember: many repair issues involve your personal safety, so it is important to live in a residence where management responds to maintenance requests in a timely manner.
- When was the last Fire Marshal Inspection?**
Ask to see a copy of the last inspection, and check the items on which the property is or is not in compliance. If the inspection is several years old, do a mini-fire inspection yourself. Hint: Look out for fire hazards, such as dumpsters within 10 feet of the residence, and barbeque grills stored on balconies. Also, check inspection tags on fire extinguishers and sprinkler systems — these tags should show proof of inspections within the last year.
- Does the apartment/house have a working smoke detector?**
For fire safety, your home must have at least one smoke detector and two emergency escape routes! (There should also be a fire extinguisher either inside the apartment/house, or outside within plain view of the front door.)
- Do doors and windows have sturdy locks?**
The front door should have a solid metal or wood core, and a deadbolt. (Good deadbolts have at least a 1” throw; this means, when you lock it the bolt should stick out at least 1” into its receptacle.) In addition, all windows and sliding doors should have secondary locks, such as Charlie Bars or Rail Locks, and there should be set screws installed in the rails of sliding glass doors to prevent removal of the door from its frame.
- Does the front door have a secondary lock that is only accessible from inside the apartment/house?**
This kind of lock helps prevent unauthorized entries by someone with a key while you are home. If there are no secondary locks like this, ask the landlord whether you can have one installed.



- Does the front door have a peephole/door viewer?**
If yes, make sure that it is operational, and familiarize yourself with visibility and blind spots. If no, ask the landlord to install one, or find out whether you can install one yourself. At the very least, you should be able to view visitors through a window!
- Are locks on the doors changed/re-keyed with each new resident?**
Ask to see documentation of the last time the locks were changed. If they are not changed with each new resident, ask whether there will be a charge to re-key the doors in the future. Also, find out if you can have the locks changed by an independent locksmith.
- Who has access to your apartment/house key other than you?**
Landlords, apartment managers, and maintenance staff often have a spare key to your residence, but it is important that you make sure they securely store this key. In addition, find out the procedures these people follow when entering your home — are they required to give you 24 hours notice before entering, and leave a note once they have been inside? Are these procedures outlined in your lease?
- Does the apartment complex have video surveillance cameras in common areas?**
Are these cameras monitored by a security guard at all times, or is the footage simply recorded and viewed at a later date?
- Does the apartment/house have its own security alarm system?**
If the residence has an alarm system, find out whether the alarm reports to the main office, an alarm monitoring company, or the police department. If there is no alarm, ask whether your lease would allow you to have a security alarm system installed.

BEFORE YOU SIGN A LEASE...

- **Insist the landlord show you the actual apartment/house you will rent**, not just a model unit! Then, complete this checklist for the specific unit.
- **Get it in writing:** if the landlord makes verbal promises, such as no rent increases, free utilities, and discounted amenities, demand he or she put them in writing.
- **Make sure all blanks on the lease are filled in correctly** before you sign it, and keep a signed copy of the lease for your records. Also, before you move in fill-out a “Move-In Inventory Form” and take photographs of any damages you record on the form. (This will help you avoid paying unnecessary property damage fees when you move out, so hold-on to the photographs and forms for your records.)
- Remember: when you sign a lease, **you’re signing a binding contract.** You are responsible for paying the rent until the end of the lease term, and no excuses (i.e. family emergencies, a roommate moving out, or changes in your study plans) release you from this responsibility.

LIVE SAFE

APARTMENT HUNTER'S CHECKLIST



When looking for a new place to live, you consider many factors, like proximity to campus, and laundry facilities. Safety should also be a major factor you think about before renting an apartment or house.

Ask yourself: Does this home and surrounding neighborhood feel safe? It is important to trust your instincts about the general safety of a property, but there are also specific things you can look for to determine how safe a place is from crime and fire.

Make copies of this checklist and fill one out for each property you visit. This way, even if you are distracted by promises of move-in specials and Olympic-sized swimming pools, you will have a record of each property's safety to look back on when making your decision.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Emergency
911

Non-Emergency
311

Austin Police Department
512-974-5000

UTPD
512-471-4441

Crime Stoppers
512-472-8477
An anonymous hotline for reporting criminal activity, in exchange for a possible financial reward

Auto Theft Tip Line
512-974-5096

Victim Services
512-974-5037

SafePlace
512-267-SAFE (7233)
A sexual assault and relationship violence hotline

UT Austin Counseling and Mental Health Center
512-471-3515 Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
Crisis Line: 512-471-CALL (2255)

UT Austin Legal Services for Students
512-471-7796 Monday thru Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
Handles disputes involving landlord-tenant, consumer and contract laws
Consultations by appointment only

UT Austin Student Emergency Services
512-471-5017
Provides support during an emergency or crisis situation

 **Fire Prevention Services**

Division of Student Affairs

LIVE SAFE

A safety guide for off-campus housing

