

## CHECKLIST FOR VACATING YOUR SPANISH WELLS SEASONAL RESIDENCE

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Anytime you are leaving your seasonal home, be prepared to deal with a number of pre-vacation preparation items. Electric, the mail, water, the police, and many more items must all be considered. While there are some vacation basics that most of us are aware of, they do need to be reviewed now and again. Even if you'll only be absent for a short while, don't allow mail or newspapers to pile up in your driveway. And, by all means, don't leave your garbage cans out during your absence. If your home is protected by an alarm system, be sure to activate it before you leave. If your alarm system is not monitored, ask a neighbor to call the police if the alarm sounds. Ask a trusted friend to keep an eye out for you, and before you walk out the door, be sure to make one final walk-thru.

- ✓ If you have gutters, remove debris and make sure they are clean, to allow rainwater to run away from the foundation, reducing the likelihood of damaging or flooding your foundation.
- ✓ Prune or trim any large tree limbs that hang over your home, and remove any hanging or broken branches, thereby reducing the chance of wind damage, in the event of summer storms.
- ✓ Store your patio furniture, freestanding grills, tools, and other outside items either in a garage or storage shed, or inside your home if necessary. If you cannot place such items inside in a protected environment, make sure they are secured and covered if possible. This helps to deter theft, as well as offering protection from strong winds and precipitation.
- ✓ Completely clean out your refrigerator (including the ice trays.) If you will be unplugging your refrigerator, drain the icemaker hose and turn off its water supply. Then prop open the refrigerator door. Although, for the minimal amount of electricity required to keep your refrigerator running, you may want to consider whether turning it off is right for you. However, in any event, place any ice makers in the off position if you will be turning off the water supply. Failure to do so will cause the motor to the ice maker to continue running in an attempt to make ice cubes, increasing the likelihood of its burning out.
- ✓ Disconnect all appliances, such as dryers, ranges, microwaves, TV's, computers, VCR's, to make sure they are not affected by lightning or other electrical surges. Don't just turn equipment off... unplug it! Small appliances, televisions, and stereo equipment can all cause a fire if left connected. Do you really want to leave the toaster plugged in that badly?
- ✓ Completely clean out your cupboards and pantries. Don't keep any foods that could potentially draw rodents. You may consider donating any leftover foods to a nearby food bank prior to your departure. If you plan to leave your refrigerator running, consider placing items like sugar, flour, cake mixes, nuts, chocolate chips, etc. in the freezer. Such items will still be usable upon your return, and you won't have to go out and buy everything again. Other items, that you might not wish to freeze, can be placed in metal cans, like those you buy popcorn in, or sealed in plastic bags or Tupperware type containers.
- ✓ Turn off the water at the main supply line. A single broken water pipe can cause thousands of dollars in damage by flooding the interior of your home. Disconnect hoses from washers and make sure the power to your hot water tank is turned off. You can do this at the main breaker box. If the power is left on and the water is turned off, the heating elements are likely to burn out if and when the tank runs dry.
- ✓ If sprinkler systems are set to run at preset times to maintain your lawn, or if you are operating a pool, you may not be able to turn the water off at the main. (TIP: If you are installing an irrigation system, an irrigation shutoff valve should always be placed between the main shutoff valve at the house and the water source. This way, the house water can be shutoff without affecting the irrigation system.) If you cannot turn off the water at the main, then install and turn off shut off valves to washers, refrigerators, and interior water lines to sinks, toilets, etc., and make sure they are turned off.
- ✓ Flush toilets, draining the tanks, and pour a Clorox solution into the bowls (never into the tank) to keep them fresh and reduce likelihood of mold and mildew. Covering the toilet bowls with a plasticized "Saran Wrap" type material not only keeps the toilet bowl fresh, but in the rare event that a critter (we once saw a squirrel make its way into the toilet of an absent client's home through the vent pipes, and it was not a pleasant event) makes his way in, resultant smells, etc. would be confined.

- ✓ If you have Comcast high speed internet service, and will be gone for three months or more, have your service put on vacation mode, and arrange for a date to have it re-activated, so it will be there upon your return.
- ✓ Make arrangements with your pest control people to continue to service your home with inspections and treatments during your absence. It doesn't take long for ants or other pesky offenders to discover a "feast" in your absence. We can recall incidents where mice have even made nests in and literally destroyed the upholstery of automobiles when left in garages during a season of an owner's absence.
- ✓ Have your postal and/or newspaper service stopped or forwarded.
- ✓ You may wish to have your phone placed on vacation mode as well. However, if your home is currently monitored by a security system which uses the phone lines for monitoring, consider the fact that if the phone is not on, your security service will not work either!
- ✓ Notify your security company, if applicable, the Spanish Wells gate house, the Sheriff's office, and your condo association management, if applicable, of the dates you expect to be away, and provide necessary contact information for them, in the event they should need to contact you with a problem. Something as simple as a window which is broken out by a golf ball could cause significant collateral damage, if no one knows how to get a hold of you to make repairs.
- ✓ Consider employing a home watch service, or have a neighbor check on your property on a regular basis, especially following a bad weather incident. Make sure you have their contact numbers written down and available, and give them yours as well.
- ✓ Lock up and secure items that would likely be subject to theft during periods of long absence. Sad though it be, there have certainly been instances where workers and maintenance people have seized opportunities to take items left otherwise unprotected.
- ✓ Make sure your lawn and pool are being maintained by a reputable company, and ask a neighbor or friend who will not be leaving to report to you in the event these companies "slack off" in your absence. We've heard frequent stories about how once an owner is gone, the lawn and pool services "cut corners" by failing to do the job as they did when the owner was present, but continue to charge the owners at the same rate as during the season, when the owner is present to oversee the work.
- ✓ Check the foundation of your home, and plug any holes to keep small animals from entering your home. If you have a fireplace, make sure the damper is left in the closed position.
- ✓ Upon vacating, do a double check to make sure all windows and doors are locked and secure, and window treatments are closed. If you have shutters, plywood, or other materials to cover windows in the event of a hurricane, make certain that someone is assigned with the responsibility and instructions in advance to protect your home, as needed, in the event of an impending storm.
- ✓ Make a list of phone numbers of people who can and would be willing to access your home if necessary, and leave a key behind with some trusted individual,
- ✓ If you have valuables, photos, collectables, etc. that you would take with you if you were facing an impending disaster, then either secure those items in a safe deposit box, or take them with you. When hurricane or other warnings do come up, your friends and neighbors tend to take care of themselves first, and might not consider your valuables to be their first priority.
- ✓ Keep the air circulating in your home to reduce the likelihood of mold and mildew. You can do this by keeping ceiling fans turned on in the low position. Also, consider installing a humidistat, and then keep it set to run the air conditioning only when the humidity reaches a certain point. Without a humidistat, you will either be forced to keep the air conditioning fully operational, or face the prospect of mold and mildew growth, due to the high humidity common to Southwest Florida, especially during the summer season.
- ✓ Place "Damp Rid" or a similar product in closets and other areas of your home, where air circulation is minimal, and humidity is high. Leave closet and interior doors open, to maximize air circulation.
- ✓ Move all houseplants to one area, preferably outdoors, making it easier for a neighbor or friend to keep them watered during your absence.
- ✓ Turn off the power switch or otherwise disconnect the garage door opener for protection against unauthorized opening of your garage and access through it to your home. It is not unusual for garage doors to be opened by someone who accidentally has the same opener code.
- ✓ Pack your stuff, load up your vehicle, and have a wonderful time, knowing that you've done everything possible to protect you property here!