Safety and Security in the Home

Owners are responsible for maintaining their property to a certain standard of “habitability.” This includes adequate, safe electrical wiring; adequate locks on doors and windows; a heating system in good working order; and adequate outside lighting. If any of these conditions are lacking or in disrepair, immediately notify the landlord or property owner and follow up in writing, keeping a copy of the letter for your records. If you are considering renting a unit that does not have adequate security or seems unsafe, and the landlord is not willing to address your concerns in writing as part of the rental agreement, we recommend to NOT RENT THAT UNIT. You have a right to live in a home that protects your personal safety and to request that repairs be made in a reasonable amount of time. “Reasonable” is determined by the seriousness of the problem.

Safety:

- Confirm that there is a working smoke alarm in all bedrooms and on every level of the home in a common area but not in the kitchen. Older smoke alarms need to be replaced every three years and the batteries yearly, new ones have a 10-year battery. Carbon monoxide detectors need to be on each level and replaced every six years or sooner, if recommended by the manufacturer.

- Turn off appliances when not in use to avoid electrical fires. Run electrical cords along walls and not under rugs, and do not overload outlets. Use a power bar with a surge protector when you need an extra outlet. Never use extension cords. Check cords regularly for damage and never repair by splicing them.

- You should have at least one fire extinguisher in the home and know how to use it. Fire extinguishers must be periodically re-charged or replaced. Check the date on the unit.

- Space heaters are not recommended because they are a common cause of fire, unless they have modern safety features.

- Clean the dryer vent after each load to reduce the risk of fire, as well as maximize efficiency.

- Never smoke in bed.

- Keep candles on a stable non-flammable surface far from combustibles, wind, doors, children, and pets. Keep in “hurricane” or other types of candle holders.

- Keep charcoal-burning barbeques at least 10 feet away from anything combustible.

- If you use a fireplace or wood-burning stove, make certain that the chimney is clean prior to first use, and then once a year. Creosote accumulates in stovetubes and chimneys and may ignite if not cleaned periodically. Never burn trash. Cracks in a wood-burning stove and in the firebrick liner must be repaired before use.

- Use care in the kitchen. Keep appliances and vents clean to prevent grease buildup. Turn pot handles inward so they aren’t easily knocked off the stove. Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen.
Community Rentals Office

- When cooking with oil, use caution and don’t leave the kitchen unattended. Watch that cooking oil isn’t heated too quickly, as this can easily start a fire. An electric range “high” might ignite cooking oil. Never put out a grease fire with water, this causes the fire to spread. Instead, use a metal pan lid to block its oxygen supply and smother a grease fire. Keep dish towels away from the stove top.

- Once a fire starts, get out of the building and call the fire department from a cell or neighbor’s phone. Never re-enter a burning building.

- If you leave on vacation or only for the weekend, turn off the water to your home. This will eliminate the possibility of water damage when you are away. Know where your water shut-off is located and how to use it. Test the shut-off frequently. If it does not work contact your landlord. In an emergency, being able to promptly stop the flow of water can save thousands of dollars in water damage.

Security:

- Lower the sound of answering machines so they cannot be heard from outside. If you have a garage door and vehicle, always keep it closed so that no one can anticipate your habits as to whether or not you are home.

- Get acquainted with your neighbors and agree to be watchful of each other’s dwellings. You may want to organize a neighborhood watch program for your complex or block. Report any suspicious or unusual activity to the police.

- Keep a few lights on when you are away, preferably on a timer. Notify your neighbors when you plan to be gone for more than a couple of days and let them know when you expect to return. Ask them to keep an eye out and to call if something seems strange. Stop deliveries of newspaper or mail or get someone to collect them for you.

- Inform someone in your household, or a good friend, of your daily schedule and places where you plan to go running, cycling, or walking, etc.

- Lock all doors and windows whenever you leave, even briefly, go to sleep, or take a shower. Close blinds and/or drapes at night. Use a dowel rod to secure a sliding glass door or window.

- Never leave a note indicating you are away. Do not enter if you return home and find a door ajar or a window broken.

- Use a heavy chain, cable, or bike lock to secure your bike to a post or a rack.

- Report any problem with a lock, lost keys, or outdoor lighting that is not operable to your landlord.
Inventory your possessions and give a copy to your parents or a relative who does not live with you. Attach sales receipts showing purchase prices and include serial numbers, model numbers, and description of the items. License your bicycle.

Avoid keeping large sums of money or expensive valuables in your home. Stow your prized possessions out of sight - in a closet, locked trunk or storage, or leave them at your family’s home. Engrave your valuables with your driver’s license or identification number and keep a record of serial numbers.

Never open doors to unknown people; ask who is there before you open the door. If you don’t know them don’t answer. Do not rely on a chain lock to prevent entry. It is not sufficient protection. If a stranger asks to use your telephone, do not open the door. Instead offer to call for emergency assistance on their behalf.

We recommend renters’ insurance to cover damage and loss of personal belongings.

Emergency Safety:

Have emergency phone numbers for the fire, police, and medical emergency handy. Establish a safe place to meet your roommates in case of a disaster. Store a battery-operated radio for use in the event of an emergency or power outage.

Register your cell phone for timely emergency notifications at http://www.nixle.com/. Doing so provides an initial warning concerning road closure, possible criminal activity, areas to avoid, and other circumstances within the City of Santa Cruz.

Put together an earthquake kit which includes, water (1 gallon/day per person), non-perishable food, can opener, blankets, a basic first-aid kit, work gloves, sturdy shoes and socks, flashlight, and batteries. Stash some cash (ATM’s don’t work when the power goes out!). It’s also a good idea to keep some water, food, and a blanket in your car, in case you get stranded somewhere. Try to keep at least a half-tank of gas in your car as well.

To prevent injury during an earthquake, avoid storing heavy objects on the tops of shelves, bookcases, and cabinets. Keep exit routes free of excess debris or belongings. Avoid using common areas as an individual’s personal space, e.g. don’t turn a dining room or family room with an exit door into an additional bedroom.

If an earthquake hits, move away from windows, utility poles and any hazardous overhead objects. Do not use matches or electrical switches until you are certain there are no gas leaks caused by the earthquake.

Know where your gas main, water main, and electrical breaker box are and how to turn them off. Buy a wrench and keep it next to the gas main.