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SAFE ROOMS

DO THEY WORK?

Many wealthy people think they need a safe room. But an improperly installed one can lead to a false sense of security.



Ever since the harrowing 2002 film *Panic Room*, clients have been coming to me saying, "I need a safe room." I understand the urge to bolster one's security. But safe rooms aren't always safe.

Here's why: If you rely on a safe room, even in conjunction with a standard alarm system, you won't know that you're faced with an intruder until he's entering your home. Depending on how well you handle stress—and very few people handle home intrusion well—that situation can range from frightening to panic-inducing. So I recommend that, instead of safe rooms, homeowners install perimeter systems around their properties.

These alarms, once available only to the military, alert you and your security provider the moment someone unexpected sets foot on your property. Video monitors record intruders when the system detects human movement. A prerecorded message loudly informs intruders that they've been discovered—an extremely effective deterrent.

But if you still want a safe room, your safety hinges on properly installing and maintaining that room. You can't simply attach a bulletproof door to your walk-in closet. Every wall—ceiling and floor included—must be Kevlar-like, so that the room can withstand bullets shot from any angle. The room must

also have independent ventilation, power and communication systems. You're not safe if you can be driven out of your hideaway because you're sweltering or suffocating—especially because, if the police come while the thief is still there, you could become a hostage.

You'll also want to make sure that you and your family members can get to the safe room from your bedrooms quickly, which could require rethinking the location of those rooms. (They should all be on the same floor.) That's why it's easier to install a safe room during construction than to retrofit an existing house.

You'll also have to ensure the creation of duplicate construction plans that don't include your safe room. Only those working on the room should know of its existence—and they should first be investigated by your private security firm, given the number of convicted felons gainfully employed as laborers.

Once you've installed your safe room, you must stock it with food, water, medication and first-aid equipment. Do you have asthma? Heart disease? Your medication has to be there, or that safe room could become your tomb.

You should also practice evacuating to the safe room at least twice a year. If the worst should occur, you'll be far more likely to use your safe room successfully if you've practiced. ●

Safe Firms

Thinking about installing a safe room? These companies bring experience, expertise and a well-vetted staff to safe-room construction.

Taconic Builders

taconicbuilders.com

Taconic builds safe rooms to withstand not just intruders but also disasters such as fires. The firm has offices in Montecito, Calif.; London; Seattle; and Manhattan, Manhattan and Oyster Bay, N.Y. Taconic safe rooms generally run from \$50,000 to \$100,000.

Little & Associates

littleassociatesinc.com

Little & Associates, which serves corporations and ultra-high net worth individuals, creates safe rooms to protect homeowners as well as their valuables. Founder Thomas Little recalls building one room to protect a client's art collection. "When you make invaluable purchases, you want to invest in keeping them," he says. Safe rooms from Little & Associates run from \$40,000 to \$500,000.