

*This article was published on: 09/01/2005*

## **BLANCHE EVANS**

*Clear the clutter*

### **Tips for an Organized, Safe Garage**

A clean, well-lit garage improves safety and impresses potential buyers.

**BY BLANCHE EVANS**

Injuries in the garage are more common than you may expect, according to a national study released last month, and most of the mishaps are due to a lack of organization.

For real estate practitioners, it makes sense to encourage sellers to get this crucial part of the property in order for showings—a move that will improve safety and make a great impression on potential buyers.

The study—conducted by the Home Safety Council in Washington, D.C. and GarageTek, a Syosset, N.Y.-based company that sells garage organization systems—reveals that nearly 60 percent of all garage users are unconcerned about safety hazards within their garage, even though one out of every three report that a garage-related injury has already occurred in their home.

Slips and falls are the most commonly recognized garage safety issue, followed by stepping on items, falling objects, and garage fires.

"As more people use the garage as an extension of their home, applying critical safety measures and staying organized will help ensure that the garage remains a safe and functional room for the entire family to enjoy," says Marc Shuman, president of GarageTek.

### **Prevent Injuries With Safe Storage**

Topping the list of garage hazards is storing dangerous items. In fact, 94 percent of garage users store at least one potentially dangerous item in their garage. Items most commonly stored are tools and sharp objects, lawn care products, automotive fluids, paint and paint thinner, cleaning products, and gasoline or propane.

For optimal safety, garage owners are advised to:

- Store shovels, rakes, lawn chairs, bikes, and other sharp or large objects on the wall and out of high-traffic areas.
- Make sure poisonous products such as pesticides, automotive fluids, lighter fluid, paint thinner, antifreeze, and turpentine have child-resistant caps, are clearly labeled, and are stored in a locked cabinet out of sight and reach of children.
- Follow manufacturers' directions when storing pool chemicals to prevent combustion and potential poisoning exposures.
- Store gasoline in small quantities only and in a proper, tightly sealed container labeled "gasoline."
- Don't keep gasoline in a garage with an appliance that contains a pilot light.

## Better Lighting, Organization Needed

More than 75 percent of reported garage-related injuries result from either slipping and falling or stepping on an object left on the garage floor, both preventable by better lighting and organization.

The majority of garage users—60 percent—say their garage is unorganized, and one out of three garages don't have sufficient lighting.

"Safety measures such as installing proper lighting and keeping floors and stairs clear of clutter are important for inside the home but also critical for the garage," says Meri-K Appy, president of the Home Safety Council. "Every family can take simple steps to maintain a clean and organized garage and ultimately increase the overall safety of their home."

Encourage garage owners to follow these organizational guidelines:

- Properly secure shelving units to the wall; make sure they aren't overloaded.
- Always store heavier items closest to the ground.
- Use a sturdy step stool with hand rails when climbing is necessary.
- Keep floors and steps clear of clutter and immediately clean up grease and spills.
- Keep children's toys in one area to prevent children from exploring potentially dangerous areas.
- Use bright lights at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Make sure your garage is well lit. Use the maximum safe wattage in light fixtures. (Maximum wattage is typically posted inside light fixtures.)
- Install secure handrails or banisters on both sides that extend the entire length of the stairs.
- Clean garage of dust, spider webs, and trash, which can interfere with the electrical system.
- Make sure that the garage door is equipped with an auto-reverse feature. Test the garage door safety device by placing a paper towel roll beneath the door as it closes. If the door opens quickly, then your family and pets will be protected from bodily entrapment.

## Benefits Go Beyond Safety

It goes without saying these tips will not only make a garage safer, but will help the property sell faster and for a higher price than a home with a dark, cluttered, and dangerous garage.

## Learn More

### [Garage Safety Checklist](#)

At this site, run by the Home Safety Council and GarageTek, you can download a free garage safety checklist to distribute to sellers. The site also includes tips on avoiding common hazards and getting organized.

### [Home Safety Council](#)

You can find Safety Guides for all areas of the home, from kitchens to playgrounds. Or check out the Resource Center for safety checklists, brochures, and a quiz.

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