

With a certified home watcher, you're sitting pretty on vacation

They inspect both the inside and outside of a house to check for leaks, insect infestations, mold, and other potential issues. They create a presence in your home, which may deter squatters and other intruders.

By **Robyn A. Friedman** Globe correspondent, Updated May 8, 2024, 10:45 a.m.



. ALLY RZESA/GLOBE STAFF; ADOBE STOCK

Tempted to hire a friend, neighbor, or house sitter to keep an eye on your home while you go on vacation or leave for the season? Not so fast.

Friends or neighbors who feel inconvenienced by the added responsibility may not check as carefully or as frequently as you'd like. A house sitter will live in your home and sleep in your bed — but have you vetted that person, run a criminal background check, or confirmed the sitter has insurance to cover any damage?

Dan Hegarty has faced this very issue. A retired sales manager who lives in North Easton, Hegarty owns a 1,400-square-foot vacation home on [Cape Cod](#) that he uses from May to September. He's tried having nearby family check on the house — an inexpensive approach, he said, but they failed to do so regularly. He also paid a friend,

but felt that person wasn't experienced enough to spot issues of concern, and as Hegarty added more sophisticated electronics to the house — like [cameras and security systems](#) — he wanted someone with more tech experience. So, he hired Patrick Foran, a Certified Home Watch Professional, whose business, Dennis-based [Foran Realty](#), is accredited by the [National Home Watch Association](#), or NHWA, a trade association that screens members; runs criminal background searches; checks references; verifies insurance, bonding, and licenses; and, for certified members, requires individuals to complete a rigorous curriculum and pass an exam.

“When you get your hair styled or your nails done, the cosmetologist or nail tech displays their license,” said [Jack Lubner](#), founder and executive director of the NHWA. “But we, as home watchers, have your keys, alarm codes, personal information, and access to your belongings. There are a lot of less-than-legitimate home watch services that offer their clients little or no protection, but we believe our clients must be protected as well as they can be.”

Lubner said home watchers don't need to be licensed in any state or municipality, except for the [Commonwealth of Massachusetts](#), which requires a [Watch Guard Patrol License](#) from the [Massachusetts State Police](#) for anyone performing such services. Under the Massachusetts statute, there's an exception from licensing for those who perform exterior checks for storm damage only.

A home watch service can give absent homeowners peace of mind. Watchers inspect both the inside and outside of a house to check for leaks, insect infestations, mold, and other potential issues. They create a presence at your home, which may deter [squatters](#) and other intruders. And they can mitigate damage by detecting problems when they first arise, not months later when the owner shows up to open the house for the season.

Lubner said the NHWA, which was founded in 2009, has more than 600 members, including 14 Certified Home Watch Professionals in New England.

Hegarty pays \$50 per visit for biweekly inspections by Foran, who said he spends about 20 minutes at each home.

“Your home is your largest asset,” Foran said. “A house watcher gives you peace of mind. If you're not here for three or six months, you have no idea what's going on.”

Chip Raffi, owner of [The Home Watchers](#) in Sandown, N.H., has just concluded his second season as a home watch professional. Previously, he was a police officer in California, a corporate executive, and the owner of an insurance agency. Raffi considers his company, an accredited member of the NHWA, to be in the risk-mitigation business.

“Homeowners are assuming a bit of a risk when they leave to go south for the winter or if they are absentee owners of a vacation property,” he said.

“Through scheduled visual inspections of unoccupied properties, we offer homeowners a way to mitigate the risk of potential vandalism, weather damage, burst water pipes, forced entry, and squatters.”

Raffi spends about 30 to 40 minutes inspecting the interior and exterior of his clients' homes and then emails

them a four-page report and photos, “so property owners, from the warmth and comfort of their Florida home, can have peace of mind knowing there’s a local advocate there on their behalf.” He charges between \$75 and \$100 per check for homes up to 2,500 square feet, and visits either weekly or biweekly, according to his clients’ preferences.

[Charlie Posnick](#), a Certified Home Watch Professional and owner of [Vermont Home Watch](#) in Jericho, Vt., said many homeowners believe that their security cameras, leak detectors, and remote temperature monitors will adequately protect their property. He respectfully disagrees.

“Those things are great, but they give you a false sense of security because you don’t get a complete picture of the condition the house is in,” Posnick said. “These devices wouldn’t indicate if a tree has fallen on the house or if the refrigerator stopped working. And, if the power or internet goes out, those Wi-Fi devices won’t work anyway.”

Posnick’s fees start at \$65 per visit, but vary based on the size of the home, the time it will take to perform a thorough inspection, and any additional client requests. He will, for example, idle a car stored in the garage or stock the fridge with groceries before the owners return. He typically spends about a half-hour inspecting each home, following a 30-item checklist on his iPad.

“The winters are harsh up here, and a lot can happen to a home when it’s unoccupied,” he said. “Discovering these issues quickly can mean the difference between a quick fix and extensive, expensive damage.”

To find a qualified home watcher who already has been vetted, check the NHTA’s searchable database at www.nationalhomewatchassociation.org for both accredited businesses and certified individuals. Verify references, and be sure to meet the specific person who will be watching your house, not just the owner of the company.

“Find someone you click with,” said Hegarty, the owner of the Cape Cod home. “It’s all about communication.”

Robyn A. Friedman has been writing about real estate and the home market for more than two decades. Follow her [@robinafriedman](#). Send comments to Address@globe.com. Follow Address on Twitter [@globehomes](#) and sign up for our free newsletter at Boston.com/address-newsletter.