

Dealing with Dangerous Ex-Convict Neighbor
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The following are my suggestions for dealing with the potentially dangerous situation of an aggressive, harassing neighbor with a criminal past. Naturally, no absolutes exist here and no advice can address every variable, but these strategies are well-tested and have proven effective in the past. It's important to analyze each situation that arises on its own merits and only respond in the way you instinctively judge as safest. My suggestions should help make that instinctive assessment more easily.

1. **MOVE! Whatever the Cost.** First and foremost, I think it's too dangerous to continue to live in the same building (or even the same area) with this neighbor, no matter what defensive steps you take, as he sounds unstable and potentially violent. Immediately, and without discussing it with anyone in the building, start looking for another place to live. Since you're both students, sometimes schools give help to students who are trying to find reasonable off-campus housing. Your employers or co-workers on your job(s) might also have suggestions. You might also try any social service agencies you can locate. In NYC where I'm from, the New York City government website has a housing department that offers such help and you might check on the internet as well for other agencies in your area that might help.
2. **Avoid contact.** Don't initiate any conversations or social engagements with the neighbor. Whenever you or your wife encounter the neighbor in the building, acknowledge his presence with a businesslike look of awareness and a calm, neutral expression, showing neither anger nor friendliness. Respond briefly and then make an excuse to terminate the encounter (example: *I've got an important phone call to make; gotta run right now*). Rehearse in advance exactly how to respond so you won't act scared or cause the neighbor to become suspicious of your motives.

I also advise carrying a canister of pepper spray in case the encounter escalates. Though legal in all 50 states, the laws and regulations vary, so check with the police or the district attorney's office for the rules in CA. Detailed information on their merits and limitations, as well as tips for proper usage, can be found on my website <http://www.crimeprevention101.com>. Here's a link: http://www.susanbartelstone.com/pdf/DefenseSprays_06-03-05.pdf

3. **Document everything.** Every encounter with the neighbor (past and future) must be documented in a notebook or on a computer flashdrive noting the date, time, location and details, in case you decide to pursue legal action at some future time. Also, document all dealings with your building management, the police and anyone else you consult and hold onto all correspondence, notes, voicemails, emails or anything else that is exchanged between you and any of the parties involved. Surreptitiously record as many conversations with the neighbor as you can where you feel threatened or in danger. My smart phone has recording capacity and small digital recorders are also available at a reasonable price. Download the recordings onto a flashdrive and hold as evidence along with everything else.

Put your concerns in writing to the landlord or building manager and give them copies of any notes the neighbor gave you that are troubling. **Stress in writing that the neighbor has reacted with anger in the past when the landlord advised him of your complaints and that they must be careful regarding your safety in any exchanges they have with this man, especially since they are aware of his past record as an ex-convict.**

You mentioned that this man was doing maintenance work around the building. Does he work part-time for the building as a handyman? Threatening and harassing tenants is against the law and this man's employment should be reconsidered in that case. Try to get in writing or digital recording any promises of action the landlord or the building management makes. If they won't put anything in writing, send them a letter by return receipt summarizing each conversation you have with them. At the bottom of the letter write: *"If this is not an accurate description of what we discussed on such and such date, please make your corrections on the back of this letter, initial them, and return to me. Otherwise, I will conclude this account is correct."* That way, you'll have written record of all their assurances.

4. **Affidavit of Abuse.** An [Affidavit of Evidentiary Abuse](#) is a tool that domestic violence victims with very violent abusers who are in life-threatening danger are urged to make use of. I suggest that you make use of this tool as well, because of the close proximity of your harasser and his criminal past. Basically, an AEA is a sworn statement detailing the facts of your harassment that will preserve the specifics so they aren't lost if the victim goes missing or turns up dead or seriously injured. Document the abuse via a posted [YouTube video](#) (which isn't hard to do) and also download it on a flashdrive and give it to family member or a trusted friend with the instructions "if I am missing or dead turn this over to the police." The AEA, unfortunately, won't save a life but it can help ensure that justice will be done in case of foul play. Here's an example of an Affidavit of Evidentiary Abuse for your reference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9uGnrtwK3Q&noredirect=1>
5. **Restraining Orders.** Nothing was mentioned about whether you've spoken with the police about your concerns. If you do go to the police, show them your compiled documentation as a first step. If they advise going to court and applying for a Restraining Order (in some states known as an **Order of Protection**) against the neighbor, there are a few cautions. While Restraining Orders have been proven to reduce the violence or harassment in many cases, they've been known to increase the violence in others. It's only a piece of paper, after all, and it won't stop a bullet or a psychotic/vindictive individual who's determined to get revenge. Visits and warnings from the police (or large, male relatives) can also stoke the violence. Before seeking a Restraining Order, consult with a local women's group or domestic violence organization like the [Family Justice Center](#) that counsels stalking and harassment victims for advice about the pros and cons of Restraining Orders and about other legal options (like mediation) that might be available in your state. Restraining Orders are imperfect devices, but necessary if you eventually choose to prosecute further. If you do obtain an Order, bear in mind that it can't be enforced until *after* it's been violated and that penalties for violation vary widely from state to state and can be distressingly mild.

Since the neighbor is in close proximity to you and there's a real potential for violence, try to get a [Restraining Order with a GPS monitoring component](#). This requires that the defendant wear an unremoveable global positioning anklet that will send an alert via phone and text to both the intended victim and the police if the boundaries or terms of the Order are being violated. Early warning should enable you to take evasive action and, hopefully, enable the police to intercept the violator before any violence is committed. About [15 states](#) offer GPS monitoring at the present time and I'm not sure if California offers them

yet but it's worth an inquiry. It's expensive to implement this program, especially in these days of austerity spending and budget cuts, but this is a life-saving option that must not be disregarded. For more information, check out my [Crime Prevention 101 radio show](#) on **Orders of Protection with a GPS Monitoring Component**: <http://bit.ly/OP-GPS>

6. **Sources of Intervention.** Is there any way to find out if your neighbor is on parole? If he is, contact his parole officer and advise him/her about the threatening exchanges. Use your documentation to substantiate your claims. If he isn't on parole; contact a group in your area like the [Fortune Society](#) (which operates in New York State) that works with ex-cons to help them re-integrate into society. In California, there's an organization called **VIP Mentors (VIP)** that recruits attorneys to be guides, advisors, friends and role models for parolees trying to turn their lives around. There's a branch in Los Angeles and maybe someone from **VIP** can intervene on your behalf with the neighbor and get through to him.
7. **Safe at Home.** Until you can find another apartment, here are a few things to increase safety in your home. Have a crime prevention officer from your local precinct come by and do a crime prevention survey assessing the quality of the locks on the doors and windows and any other security vulnerabilities. They're the best ones to recommend upgrades and it's a free service. Safety gates are a fairly inexpensive option but you may need permission from your landlord to install them. Reasonably-priced alarm systems are available as well and there are wireless models designed especially for apartments. My favorite online source for home security products is [Brickhouse Security](#). **Brickhouse** also carries many video surveillance products but they're usually pretty expensive.
8. **Home Alone.** If you decide not to purchase a wireless security system for the apartment, hang wind chimes or tinkly objects on the windows and put plants or statues on the sills; anything that will make noise if an intruder tries to enter. That way, you'll get early warning of danger in case you or your wife are home alone (or simply fast asleep) and can take evasive action. If you hear someone breaking in, get out quickly and phone 911 from outside the apartment. Rehearse in advance what you'd do if the neighbor (or anyone else) breaks in and you can't get out of the apartment.
9. **Pepper Foam.** Hide several containers of [pepper foam](#) (better for indoor use than a spray) around the apartment, especially the bedroom, and look into getting a stun gun or two to carry or keep in strategic places. If you can't get out of your apartment easily in case of a home intrusion, grab your pepper foam, stun gun or any heavy object that's nearby--and a cell phone--and hide somewhere like a closet. Maybe buy an inexpensive prepaid phone and keep it (charged!) in your hiding place so you know you'll be able to call for help while in hiding. Rehearse this scenario as well and make sure you know how to use your pepper foam or other weapon if attacked.
10. **10 Tips.** Take a look at my [Big 10 Tips for Keeping Yourself Safe!](#) Some good information there as well.