

Tips for a Happy and Safe Holiday

During the year-end holidays, people are often busy, excited and sometimes a little bit careless. The following holiday crime prevention tips can be shared with members of the community to make everyone a little bit safer.

At Home

Be extra cautious about locking doors and windows when you leave your house or apartment, even if it only for a few minutes. The best locks in the world do not work if they are not used.

Don't display holiday gifts where they can be seen from a window or doorway. Store gifts before you go away on a holiday trip. Like the adage says, "Out of sight, out of mind."

If you go out for the evening, turn on lights and a radio or television so the house or apartment appears to be occupied. If you are going to be away for an extended time, light sensor lights or timers can give your house a lived in feel.

Have a neighbor or family member watch your house, pick up the mail and newspaper, and park his or her motor vehicle in your driveway from time to time. Burglars like to target houses where the owners are on vacation.

Participate in Operation Identification and mark your valuables with a unique identification number such as a driver's license and maintain a list of model numbers and serial numbers of your property in case of theft. These lists and photos of your property also help with insurance claims if necessary. Immediately after the holidays, mark new gifts with an identification number and record new serial numbers.

Be wary of strangers soliciting for charitable donations. They may attempt to take advantage of people's generosity during the holidays. Ask for identification, how donated funds are used, if contributions are tax deductible, etc. If you aren't satisfied with the answers, don't give. They may also be using the ruse to see if you are home in an attempt to break in. Consider answering through the door as to not give a bad guy a chance to see inside or to force his/her way in.

Test your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers. Replace batteries every 6 months and refill extinguishers as necessary. Also, if your smoke detector is over 5 years old, it should be replaced.

Use only fire resistant ornaments on a holiday tree and make sure electric lights are in good working order with no frayed wires. Don't leave the lights on overnight or when you are away from home.

Avoid leaving boxes from purchases (especially TV's, VCR's, video games, computer, etc.) out on the curb for trash pickup.

Shopping

Shop before dark if possible. Possibly coordinate shopping trips with a friend. Never park in an unlit lot or area, no matter how convenient it is.

If you need to make a trip out to your car while shopping to unload your purchases into the trunk, take the extra security precaution to move your car. That way, if someone is watching the parking lot, he/she will not have seen you leave the items in the car.

Lock your packages and gifts in your vehicle's trunk. Keep your vehicle's doors locked and windows closed.

Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. Pay for purchases with a credit card or debit cards when possible. Do not leave receipts in the bag. Thieves can use your receipts to return your merchandise for cash. An extra bonus to using credit cards is that most stores will refund purchases back to the same account used for the purchase, so if a bad guy tries to return your merchandise, your account will be credited.

To discourage purse-snatchers, don't overburden yourself with packages. Have your purchases delivered whenever practical.

Be extra careful with purses and wallets. Carry a purse under your arm. Keep a wallet in an inside jacket pocket, not a back trouser pocket.

Teach children to go to a store clerk or security guard and ask for help if you become separated. They should never go into a parking lot alone.

Do not leave your purse unattended in your shopping carts. A moment of distraction can lead to the loss of your purse or wallet. Strap the purse in using the child restraint belts and keep all zippers and flaps closed to discourage someone passing by and lifting your wallet.

Pickpockets

Pickpockets like to take advantage of crowds in stores, on the street and on public transportation. Many work in teams with one distracting the victim while the other does the actual pick pocketing. Beware of anyone who jostles you. It may be accidental but, then again, it may not.

For women who carry a purse, one that has a flap which folds over the opening and fastens at the bottom is preferable to one that can be opened simply by turning a clasp at the top. Men who carry wallets or a money clip should keep them in inner or side pockets rather than rear trouser pockets.