

## Tips for a Safe and Happy Holiday Season

The holidays will soon be upon us, and as usual, faster than we expected. During this festive season, our thoughts turn to gifts, visiting friends and relatives, and delightful culinary experiences. However, there are others who think about unoccupied appliance filled houses or apartments, distracted shoppers with extra cash in a purse or wallet or they are planning their next “charity scam.”

Statistically, crime usually increases during the holiday season. The basic reason for this is really very simple. More people with more cash, gifts, etc. are “out and about” which presents more opportunities for the criminal looking for an easy “score.” Of course, the happy shopper is rushing around, stressed out and careless, looking for last-minute gifts, trying to get everything done or thinking about what to buy “the person who has everything.” The happy shopper is not thinking about the person in the store or parking lot that has followed you and knows exactly where you keep your cash or where you parked your car. Do not give a thief an even chance this year.

I have provided a number of crime prevention tips that if practiced, should see you through a safe holiday season. Please exercise caution during this upcoming special season. Trust your instincts, if something does not look or feel right, it probably isn't. Remember, being safe should never take a holiday.

### **WHILE SHOPPING:**

- Stay alert and be aware of everything around you. Take a minute to observe who may be watching you
- Park in a highly visible well-lighted space. It may be daylight when you arrive at the Mall, but when you come out at 5 or 6 P.M. it will be dark
- Lock your vehicle both when driving and parked
- Carry your purse close to you body, not dangling by the straps. Put a wallet in an inside coat or front pants pocket
- Have your car keys in your hand and be ready to open the car door immediately
  
- Place all shopping bags, packages and gifts out of sight (trunk, under seat).
- Always know where you have parked your car, so you do not spend unnecessary time walking around the parking lot
- Look inside and under your car before entering
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash – use debit card, credit card or check
- Do not overburden yourself with packages. This will help deter pickpockets or purse snatchers
- Do not park next to a van or truck where people can hide
- If you take children shopping, teach them to go to a police officer or a store security officer if they get separated or lost. Ensure children know that mommy and daddy would never send a person they did not know to “take them home” or “take them to find mommy or daddy.”

## **OUT FOR THE EVENING:**

- Turn on lights, television or radio so that it appears that someone is home
- Lock all doors and windows, even if you plan to be gone for a few minutes
- Holiday gifts should not be displayed where they can be seen from the outside

## **HOLIDAY TRAVELING:**

- Ask a neighbor to watch your house or apartment, ask them to park in your driveway or space from time to time
- Use automatic timers for your lights
- Stop your mail and newspaper deliveries
- Arrange to have snow shoveled (if necessary) while you are away

## **WHILE DRIVING:**

- Be alert at intersections and stoplights. They can be favorite spots for persons with a criminal intent
- Keep your car in gear. If you are threatened, blow the horn, then drive away. Leave enough space between you and the car in front of you to pull around if necessary
- Keep windows rolled up and doors locked at all times
- Keep valuables (purses, packages, wallets, etc.) out of sight
- If followed – do not drive home. Go to a police station, fire house, gas station or other public place
- If car breaks down, stay with the car and accept NO rides. If someone stops to help, ask them to call the police. Use a cell phone if available
- Keep your vehicle well maintained and gassed up
- When partaking of “holiday cheer,” good judgment is always in order. Remember seatbelts do save lives

## **AT HOME:**

- Keep all doors and windows locked, even if you step out for a moment
- Mark all your property with an “identifier” type number. DO NOT use your social security number. Some prefer their driver’s license number
- Video tape valuables as a record of ownership
- Inspect all holiday lights for frayed wiring before you hang them
- If you are using a ladder to hang holiday decorations, make sure it is properly secured
- Keep holiday decorations and plants away from young children and pets. Some are poisonous
- Place your holiday tree, decorations, etc. away from heating vents or fireplaces to reduce the risk of fire.
- Keep fresh cut holiday greenery watered
- Use extreme caution when using lighted candles as part of your holiday celebration
- Beware of strangers coming to the door asking for charitable donations. Ask them four questions: Can you show some identification, is the donation tax deductible, how will the funds be used, and may I have a receipt. If you are not satisfied with any or all the answers tell them “no thank you” and close the door. Help a work sponsored charitable group or a charity that has special meaning to you or a loved one

## **AT THE ATM:**

- Stay Alert. Be aware of your surroundings when you use an ATM, especially at night. Park in a well lighted area and have someone accompany you
- Report Suspicious People. If you notice anything unusual, cancel your transaction, pocket your card and leave IMMEDIATELY. Go to a safe place and call police
- Be Prepared. Have everything ready (deposit slips, card) when arriving at the ATM. When you have completed the transaction, pocket your cash and card immediately. COUNT YOUR CASH AND PUT YOUR CARD AWAY LATER
- Drive-Up ATM. When using a drive-up ATM, remember to always keep doors locked, all other (except driver's side) windows up and the car running
- Treat Your ATM Card Like Cash. Guard your ATM card as carefully as you do cash, debit or credit cards, and checks. Never give account numbers or card information over the phone, unless you know exactly who you are speaking to
- Keep Your Personal Identification Number (PIN) Secret. Do not write your PIN on your card or keep it written somewhere in your wallet. Never tell anyone your PIN

Please remember to enjoy the holiday season and not be lulled into becoming a victim. Following the few simple suggestions presented in this article can ensure your holidays are safe and enjoyable. Also, do not permit "holiday stress" to get the best of you. Make time to get together with friends and family, and consider reaching out to others in need. By doing your part, everyone can enjoy a safe and happy holiday season – except for the thief or "con-artist."

You may also access additional safety tips by visiting our Public Safety web page: [Personal Safety Tips](#)

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