

CRIME PREVENTION AND SAFETY TIPS

Crime Prevention Tips for the Holiday Season

The Fairfax County police remind us: everyone is looking for extra money or gifts during the holiday season, from mid-November through early January, and that includes criminals. They are out in force!

Preventing Larcenies from Vehicles

- The best way to protect your valuables is to take them out of your vehicle. Criminals steal belongings because they can see them! Something that may be of little value to you might be of tremendous value to others!
- Always lock your car doors! It is your first line of defense against having your items or vehicle stolen.
- Please take the time to physically remove:
 - CD players, Bluetooth devices, laptops, GPS units, radios, purses.
 - Remove all bags or briefcases as they pique the curiosity of criminals.
 - Clean residue from the suction cup ring left on your windshield from your GPS unit.

Personal Safety When Shopping

- It is best to shop during daylight hours; if shopping at night, park in well-lit areas.
- Know exactly where you park your car.
- Avoid shopping alone.
- Carry keys, cash and credit cards separate from each other and be constantly paying attention to your surroundings.
- Minimize amounts of cash and credit cards you carry. If possible, avoid carrying a purse. Better, use a fanny pack or deep pockets in clothing to carry what you need.
- If you carry a purse, keep it close to your body and always zipped or snapped.
- If a stranger “accidentally” bumps into you, it may be a diversion for a pick-pocket.
- Avoid carrying large packages that block your vision; it makes you a target for thieves.
- Avoid shopping until you are exhausted. You are more alert when you are less tired.
- When hurried or in a crowded shop, make sure you get all forms of identification and credit cards returned to you before you leave.
- Leave the mall/store before closing time. Walk with others, i.e. safety in numbers.
- Be alert while walking to your car. Look for anything that seems irregular. Once you are confident, get in and lock it immediately upon entering.

- If a van is parked next to your car, you might enter through the passenger side.
- Avoid using ATMs at night and keep others from observing you type in your PIN.

Home Security

- Do not leave valuable items where they can be seen through your windows.
- Do not leave the boxes of your Christmas gifts (such as computers, televisions, etc.) at the curb as this advertises the contents of your home to potential thieves.
- Ensure doors and windows are locked at all times, even when you are home.
- Use timers on lights to give the appearance you are home when you are not.
- If you order gifts to be delivered to your home, ensure someone is there to accept the package. Have a trusted neighbor keep a lookout for the packages.
- If you go out of town for the holidays, make sure you ask a trusted neighbor, friend or family member to view the house at least once a day and pick up mail and newspapers. Provide your contact number in case of emergency.
- Make sure your home address is not showing on your luggage.

Identity Theft Protection

- Watch for shoulder-surfers, i.e. potential thieves seek to learn a PIN number at an ATM machine or a credit card number being spoken on a cell phone. Be aware of who is nearby when you are using an ATM and block the view of the keys you're pressing. Similarly, look to see who may be listening.
- Use photo ID verification instead of signing the backs of your credit cards. You can write "See Photo ID". If a thief has the opportunity to capture your credit card number, he/she could just as easily use your credit card to make online or telephone purchases. Protect it!
- Shred everything. One of the ways that would-be identity thieves acquire information is through "dumpster-diving," aka trash-picking. If you discard bills and credit card statements, old credit cards or ATM receipts, medical statements or even junk-mail solicitations for credit cards and mortgages, you may be giving up crucial personal information. Solution: buy a shredder (\$50 - \$150) depending on your need and shred all personal information.

General Home Safety Year Round

- Lock your doors whether you are at home or away.
- Smoke detectors are both inexpensive and valuable; carbon monoxide detectors are rather expensive, but they can save your life.
- Have a fire extinguisher on each level, and consider having one in your bedroom.
- Be careful when you enter your shed, and avoid letting it close on its own. There have been a few incidents when a home owner's door slams shut, the padlocking device catches itself, and the owner is trapped. Solution: block the door.