

CRIME WATCH—WINTER QUARTER

And now the holidays are upon us. It's hard to believe the current year will soon be in our rear-view mirror. Holidays present a host of unique safety and security challenges. For example, your trash after Christmas (those boxes stacked up outside) gives potential thieves a shopping list of things they might want to "recycle" for cash.

Burglars know that many households have new, and oftentimes expensive, items in their homes following the December holidays—especially items such as new computers and peripherals, stereo components, televisions, cameras and other electronic equipment. In too many cases, residents make it easy for burglars to figure out which homes to target by putting boxes that identify their new gifts in plain view with their other garbage. Avoid becoming an easy target for post-holiday burglars by not leaving boxes for new electronics and other items in the alley or other garbage pick-up locations for several days at a time. Instead, break down any boxes you are throwing out, put them in garbage bags and place them inside a trash can. (In many cases, especially with computer equipment, you might consider keeping the boxes for safe storage, shipping or moving in the future.) Think about keeping broken-down boxes inside—in a garage, for example—until the evening before your regular garbage pick-up. Some burglars actually look inside garbage cans for evidence of holiday gifts.

A recent trend involves individuals stealing UPS, Fedex, USPS, etc. packages left at your front door. This has become a nationwide problem. Here are numerous tips on how to protect packages, that are being sent to you, from theft, and also how to safeguard anything you're sending out. (Robert Siciliano, CEO of IDTheftSecurity.com)

1. Get a tracking number from the shipping company.
2. Require a signature with the delivery.
3. If you won't be home, have the company leave the package at a local shipping center.
4. Set up an obvious surveillance camera with your home security system.
5. If UPS is making the delivery, get onboard with their U.P.S. My Choice program, which sends an e-mail or text message to the customer just prior to package arrival; it will be rerouted if nobody is home.
6. Insist that the driver leave the package in an inconspicuous area.
7. Have the driver leave the package at your apartment's or condo's office.
8. Retrieve your mail as quickly as possible after delivery.
9. If you can't retrieve it daily, have a trusted person get it.
10. If you're traveling, have the post office hold your mail until you get back.
11. Never received mail you were expecting? Contact the sender to see if it was sent. If so, file a complaint with the post office. This also applies if the contents of mail are missing.
12. Bring your checks or money orders to a postal collection box (personally give it to a postal worker) for the delivery driver to pick up; don't leave checks or money orders in your home mailbox.
13. Never leave packages outside your door.
14. Alert recipients of your packages as to when they are to expect them.
15. Insure any packages you send.

The following Holiday Safety Tips were compiled, in cooperation with the LAPD Crime Prevention Section, to contribute to the safety and security of people during the holiday

season. The holiday season is always a special time of year. It is also a time when busy people become careless and vulnerable to theft and other holiday crime. We can never be too careful, too prepared or too aware. Please share this information with family, friends and neighbors.

Driving

- Avoid driving alone or at night.
- Keep all car doors locked and windows closed while in or out of your car. Set your alarm or use an anti-theft device.
- If you must shop at night, park in a well-lighted area.
- Avoid parking next to vans, trucks with camper shells, or cars with tinted windows.
- Park as close as you can to your destination and take notice of where you parked.
- Never leave your car unoccupied with the motor running or with children inside.
- Do not leave packages or valuables on the seat of your car. This creates a temptation for thieves. If you must leave something in the car, lock it in the trunk or put it out of sight.
- Be sure to locate your keys prior to going to your car.
- Keep a secure hold on your purse, handbag and parcels. Do not put them down or on top of the car in order to open the door.
- When approaching or leaving your vehicle, be aware of your surroundings.
- Do not approach your car alone if there are suspicious people in the area.
- Ask mall or store security for an escort before leaving your shopping location.

Automated Teller Machine (ATM)

- If you must use an ATM, choose one that is located inside a police station, mall, or well-lighted location. Withdraw only the amount of cash you need.
- Protect your PIN by shielding the ATM keypad from anyone who is standing near you.
- Do not throw your ATM receipt away at the ATM location.

Shopping

- Shop during daylight hours whenever possible. If you must shop at night, go with a friend or family member.
- Dress casually and comfortably.
- Avoid wearing expensive jewelry.
- Do not carry a purse or wallet, if possible.
- Always carry your Driver License or Identification Card along with necessary cash, checks and/or a credit card you expect to use.
- Even though you are rushed and thinking about a thousand things, stay alert to your surroundings.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash.
- Pay for purchases with a check or credit card when possible.
- Keep cash in your front pocket.
- Notify the credit card issuer immediately if your credit card is lost, stolen or misused.
- Keep a record of all of your credit card numbers in a safe place at home.
- Be extra careful if you do carry a wallet or purse. They are the prime targets of criminals in crowded shopping areas, transportation terminals, bus stops, on buses and other rapid transit.
- Avoid overloading yourself with packages. It is important to have clear visibility and freedom of motion to avoid mishaps.

- Beware of strangers approaching you for any reason. At this time of year, "con-artists" may try various methods of distracting you with the intention of taking your money or belongings.

Children

- If possible, leave small children at home with a trusted babysitter.
- Teach your child to go to a store clerk and ask for help in case your child is separated from you.
- Teach children to stay close to you at all times while shopping.
- Never allow children to make unaccompanied trips to the restroom.
- Children should never be allowed to go to the car alone and they should never be left alone in the car.
- Teach children their full name, address and telephone number to give to police officers or mall security. Teach children to immediately inform you if a stranger is bothering them.

At Home

- Be extra cautious about locking doors and windows when you leave the house, even for a few minutes.
- When leaving home for an extended time, have a neighbor or family member watch your house and pick up your newspapers and mail.
- Indoor and outdoor lights should be on an automatic timer.
- Leave a radio or television on so the house looks and sounds occupied.
- Large displays of holiday gifts should not be visible through the windows and doors of your home.
- When setting up a Christmas tree or other holiday display, make sure doors and passageways are clear inside your home.
- Be sure your Christmas tree is mounted on a sturdy base so children, elderly persons or family pets cannot pull it over on themselves.
- If you use lights on your Christmas tree ensure the wiring is not damaged or frayed. Frayed or damaged wiring can cause a fire.
- Place your Christmas tree in water or wet sand to keep it green.
- Never place wrapping paper in your fireplace.

Strangers at Your Door

- Be aware that criminals sometimes pose as couriers delivering gifts.
- It is not uncommon for criminals to take advantage of the generosity of people during the holiday season by soliciting donations door-to-door for charitable causes although no charity is involved.
- Ask for their identification, and find out how the donated funds will be used. If you are not satisfied, do not donate.
- Donate to a recognized charitable organization.

Hosting a Party

- Have non-alcoholic beverages available for party guests.
- Find alternative transportation for intoxicated guests.
- Arrange for an official designated driver for your party who will not drink at all.

Attending a Party

- Have something to eat before consuming alcoholic beverages.
- Eat high protein foods that will stay in your stomach longer and slow the absorption of alcohol into your system.
- Remember only time will eliminate the alcohol from your body.
- Know your safe limit.
- Never drink and drive.

HOLIDAY MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

The holidays are an exciting time of year for kids, and to help ensure they have a safe and happy holiday season, here are some safety and mental health tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

- Take care of yourself - Just like they say on the airplane, "In the event of an emergency, put your own oxygen mask on first, and then help children travelling with you to put theirs on." Children respond to the emotional tone of their important adults, so managing your emotions successfully can help your children handle theirs better, too.
- Make a plan to focus on one thing at a time - Try a few ideas from "mindfulness" as a strategy to balance the hustle and bustle of things like shopping, cooking, and family get-togethers during the holidays: stop and pay attention to what is happening at the moment, focus your attention on one thing about it, notice how you are feeling at the time, withhold immediate judgment, and instead be curious about the experience.
- Give to others - Make a new holiday tradition to share your time with families who have less than you do, for example, if your child is old enough, encourage him or her to join you in volunteering to serve a holiday meal at your local food bank or shelter. Help your child write a letter to members of the armed forces stationed abroad who can't be home with their own family during the holidays.
- Keep routines the same – stick to your child's usual sleep and mealtime schedules when you can to reduce stress and help your child and you enjoy the holidays.
- Keep your household rules in effect. Adults still have to pay the bills and kids still need to brush their teeth before bedtime!
- Teach the skills that children will need for the holidays in the weeks and months ahead. For example, if you plan to have a formal, sit-down dinner, practice in advance by having a formal sit-down dinner every Sunday night.
- Don't feel pressured to "over-spend." Think about making one or two gifts instead of buying everything. Help your child make a gift for his or her other parent, grandparents, or other important adults and friends. Chances are, those gifts will be the most treasured ones and will teach your child many important lessons that purchasing presents can't.
- Most important of all, enjoy the Holidays for what they are - time to enjoy with your family. So, be a family, do things together like sledding or playing board games, spend time visiting with relatives, neighbors and friends.

My previous articles on situational awareness apply even more during the holidays. The season is one of sharing. We can do this by keeping watch for each other in our

neighborhood. Be alert for strangers who don't belong in our area. Report suspicious activity to the Plano Police. (Have detailed descriptions especially full license plate numbers.)

Happy holidays!

Finally, let's review the basic year-round crime prevention attitudes:

- **Lock your car when you're not in it (both on the street and in your garage).**
- **Don't leave your automatic garage door opener in your car—take it with you.**
- **Don't leave your garage door open when you're not in the garage.**
- **Lock the door between your garage and your home.**
- **Lock your back gate.**
- **Be situationally aware wherever you are; home, school, supermarket, mall, etc.**
- **Report to the police in a timely manner (as soon as practicable) suspicious people in neighborhood—get full license plate numbers and accurate descriptions of the suspicious persons.**
- **Don't let your house convey the “not home” look—use lights on timers, make arrangements for mail and newspapers, etc.**
- **If a stranger knocks on your front door or rings the doorbell, don't open the door. Instead in a loud, forceful voice say, “Who is it? What do you want.” (The stranger will probably make some lame excuse and then walk away. If he/she hears nothing from inside the house, stand by. In 5 to 15 minutes someone will be in your back yard and trying to kick in your back door!)**

Please feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions or suggestions. I look forward to meeting each of you as we together work to make Kimberlea an even better place to live and raise our families.

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