



Holiday Crime Prevention

During the holiday season, shoppers may be so busy that they fail to be aware of their surroundings. Careless or unaware shoppers are easy pickings for purse snatchers and street robbers.

Scan your immediate area; don't assume that you are secure because there are people around you. Situational awareness is simply being alert to what is going on around you, most importantly being able to pick up on signs of danger or threatening behavior.

Every good police officer is trained to read the environment. Likewise, you should ask yourself questions when you are out and about.

For example, when you are in a parking lot or garage, be alert to someone who appears to be standing around for no good reason. He or she might be waiting for someone – or that person could be an opportunist waiting to grab your shopping bags or your purse.

If a situation does not look right, don't hesitate to call the police. If it is an emergency call 911, if feel that it is not an emergency but might need to be looked into call our dispatch direct line 409-643-5720.

Shopping

- Always walk and park in well-lit areas. Park close to the entrance of the store or mall, if possible. Even outside of the mall, stick to well-lit, well-traveled streets, walkways and parking areas for walking and parking.
- Don't talk on a cell phone when walking through parking lots and streets. Your phone conversation is a distraction that makes you vulnerable to robbers. Keep your full attention on your surroundings. Also, your cell phone itself can be a tempting target to thieves.
- Don't electronically unlock your vehicle until you are within door opening distance. This helps stop a thief from getting into the car and waiting to strike when you least expect it.
- If you are ready to leave the mall and feel uneasy about entering the parking lot or garage by yourself, stay in the mall and ask for a security escort.

- Do **not** open your car door to anyone in a parking lot or garage. If you believe you are in danger, call 911 immediately.
- Don't flash large amounts of cash or offer tempting targets for theft such as expensive jewelry or clothing.
- Carry a purse or shoulder bag close to your body, not dangling by straps. Put a wallet in an inside pocket of your coat or front pants pocket.
- Don't fumble for car keys. Have them in your hand, ready to use when you reach the car.
- If you believe someone is following you, cross the street, switch directions, walk into a store or restaurant. If you are really scared, yell. Don't be embarrassed. Your safety is more important.
- If you elect to be armed, make sure that you are properly licensed and have a firm understanding of the law, when and how use of your weapon is proper, and the signage that gives notice of where you cannot carry your weapon. Always be safe and responsible.

Vehicle Safety

- Always lock your car, even if you are away for only a few moments.
- Do **not** leave valuables – gifts, cell phones, purse or clothing – in open view in your car. Take valuables with you, lock them in your trunk, or cover them in an unobtrusive way.
- Thieves do their own form of window shopping. They look in parked cars for gifts and other merchandise, and will break through car windows to get at such valuables.
- When you return to your vehicle after your shopping trip, lock your car door as soon as you get in.

Home

- Always lock your doors and windows, even if you plan to be out for a short while.
- Deadbolt locks on the doors are preferable.
- Leave lights turned on both inside and outside your residence after dark. Criminals don't like bright places.
- If you will be away from home for several days, make arrangements for someone to pick up your mail and newspapers. An overstuffed mailbox is a sure sign that no one is home, and burglars are tempted to check those envelopes for holiday gifts.
- When returning home after a shopping trip, be sure to have the house keys in your hand, ready to use when you reach the door.
- Look into having a monitored alarm installed on your home.
- If you have valuable items such as jewelry, guns or collectables store them in a safe deposit box or consider a fire safe which can be bolted to the floor or wall.

Beware of Purse Snatchers

The stores are putting up decorations, and purse snatchers are practicing their skills. The Texas City Police Department wants everyone to be aware that thieves look forward to holidays as

much as everyone else – maybe more so! The department asks shoppers to beware of purse snatchers; women carrying pocketbooks are easy prey. The thieves know that during the holidays, shoppers are distracted and are not as careful as they should be when out.

Here are some things that can be done to thwart the would-be thief.

- Keep your purse close to your body.
- If the pocketbook has long straps, shorten them.
- If possible, avoid carrying a large purse when shopping. A fanny pack is compact and more difficult for a thief to grab and run.
- Carry only the credit cards you intend to use, leave the others behind.
- Use check cards or checks to avoid carrying large amounts of cash.
- Use ATMs wisely. Have the card ready before approaching the machine, and use ATMs in high traffic areas. Be aware of anyone loitering in the area of the ATM machine.

Do Your Homework Before Donating To Charity

- Be wary of any organization that sends unsolicited e-mail or makes phone calls asking for donations. Do not open any attachment associated with suspect messages.
- If you want to give, find out how an organization accepts donations.
- If you have doubts about a group, there are ways to access information on charitable organizations. Check up on the group by going to their web site and contacting the Texas Secretary of State to verify the group's status as a charity.
- Give to organizations with a history of service and commitment to the community.

Charitable giving is noble, but beware. When approached by charitable groups, ask questions before you give and don't give any group too much of your personal information (such as date of birth, social security number, bank account numbers, or passwords). Your personal information can be used without your knowledge, if you don't safeguard it.

Extend The Life Of Your Holiday Gifts: Get Them Engraved

Consider having valuable gifts engraved with your driver's license number or Texas ID number. If the item is stolen and later recovered by police, the engraved number will allow investigators to return the property to you. Engraving also may deter thieves because the identifying information makes it more difficult for them to dispose of or sell valuables.

Easy-to-use engraving equipment and is available and relatively inexpensive. Engrave a driver's license number or Texas ID number on your property.

- Never use your Social Security number.
- Do not limit engraving to your holiday gifts. You can engrave all of your precious possessions.

- Do an inventory of your engraved items to include any serial numbers and a photograph of the item. This can help the police to enter some items into our computer system and make recovering them more likely.

What to do if you have information about a crime

If a crime is in progress call 911.

You can contact the Police Department directly at 409-643-5720 or you can call Crime Stoppers at 409-945-8477 (TIPS) to make an anonymous tip.