

Public Safety Bulletin #4

Holiday Safety

'Tis the season for shopping, travel, decorating and parties. 'Tis also the season for increased risk for crime, fire and accidents. As we plan our celebrations, burglars and thieves are making plans, too. And, unfortunately, fire departments across the country are expecting increased activity as well.

The National Crime Prevention Council reports that the holidays are an especially tempting time for burglars. Lots of expensive gifts stacked up at home and lots of time spent away from the house at parties, shopping or travel, provide big opportunities for thieves.

- *Take special notice of who is in the neighborhood. If you see suspicious activity, call police and write down a description.*
- *Criminals may pose as delivery personnel. Check credentials and call the delivery company to verify.*
- *Be aware of charity fraud. Some criminals try to collect for charities that don't exist. Give to charities you know and trust.*
- *Don't store or display gifts where they can be seen from outside.*
- *Don't leave boxes from electronics and other expensive gifts where they can be seen. Break down boxes and put them in trash bags when you throw them away.*
- *Keep your house looking "lived in." Whether you're away for an afternoon of shopping or for a week at grandmother's house, make it look as though someone is home.*
- *When you're shopping, walk confidently and park in well-lighted areas close to stores.*
- *Don't carry a wad of cash; use checks or credit cards instead. If you must carry cash, keep large amounts separate from your wallet or purse.*
- *Pickpockets bump into people to distract them, so be alert to jostling. Keep your wallet in a front pants pocket or inside coat pocket. Carry purses close to your body, with the opening toward you.*
- *Lastly, shop with a friend; there's safety in numbers. If you do find yourself alone when leaving a store, especially at night, ask for an escort whenever available. Many retailers utilize security staff to provide this service.*

Fire danger increases as we decorate with flammable items, burn candles, string electric lights and do more cooking. Most holiday fires can be easily prevented if you use good judgment and follow these tips:

- *The leading cause of home fires is unattended cooking. Always keep your eye on food on the stove, on the grill, in the deep fryer or in the oven.*
- *Never leave lit candles, holiday lights, fireplaces or space heaters unattended. Make sure lit candles are in stable holders that cannot be easily knocked over. Keep lit candles away from decorations and drapes.*
- *Only use UL-approved holiday lights and extension cords. Do not overload outlets.*
- *Inspect light strings for frayed wire, broken insulation or sockets.*
- *Keep your tree well-watered and away from all heat sources. Promptly discard dry trees.*
- *Always call **911** to report all crimes and suspicious activity.*