

PUBLIC SAFETY BULLETIN: WINTER HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

This holiday season, don't let the spirit of giving lull you into giving burglars, muggers and pickpockets a better chance to do their dirty work. Crooks love the holiday season as much as everyone else, especially because it's an opportune time for crime.



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If You Are Traveling

- Ask a neighbor to watch your home and park in the driveway from time to time.
- Don't forget to have mail and newspaper delivery stopped. If it piles up, it's a sure sign you're gone.
- Get an automatic timer for your lights.

If You Are Out for the Evening

- Turn on lights and a radio or TV so it looks like someone is at home.
- Be extra cautious about locking doors and windows when you leave, even if it's just for a few minutes.
- Don't display gifts where they can be seen from outside.



Protect Your Vehicle

- Loading up on all those gifts is a sign of progress in the holiday shopping. But if those packages are left out in the open after they're in the car, your car has become a likely target for thieves. Remember the old cliché, "Out of sight, out of mind?" The same idea applies to items in your car.
- Always lock your vehicle and store all items out of sight. Breaking into an empty car isn't worth a thief's time. However, anything left in plain view - from your holiday gifts to spare change, sunglasses, CDs, cellphones or briefcases - may tempt a thief.
- Help prevent your vehicle from being stolen by always locking your car and using anti-theft devices. And although it's cold, never leave your vehicle running while you run inside your home or a store - even if for only a minute or two.



If a Stranger Comes to the Door

- Criminals sometimes pose as couriers delivering gifts, so be cautious when accepting a package.
- It's not uncommon for people to try to take advantage of others' generosity during the holidays by going door to door for charitable donations when there's no charity involved. Ask for identification and find out how the funds will be used. If you aren't satisfied, don't give. Help a charitable organization you know and like instead.



After You've Opened the Gifts

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, TVs, 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 pickup 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 pickup. Some burglars look inside garbage cans for evidence of holiday gifts. And, of course, if you see someone suspicious casing your alley or if you witness a burglary in progress, call the police at 911.



Take a Holiday Inventory

- The holidays are a good time to update - or create - your home inventory. Take photos or make videos of items and list descriptions and serial numbers. If your home is burglarized, having a detailed inventory can help identify stolen items and make insurance claims easier to file.
- Make sure things like TVs, VCRs, stereo equipment, cameras, camcorders, sports equipment, jewelry, silver, computers, home office equipment and power tools are on the list. Remember to check it twice!



Holiday Package Theft

- Track deliveries online and confirm delivery has occurred. You can sign up for email notifications to track your packages from initial shipment to its arrival at your home, or the recipient's address if you have the gift delivered directly.
- If you know a family member or neighbor will be home, ask them to pick up packages as soon as they are delivered. Reward them with fresh-baked cookies!
- Switch delivery location to work where packages can be received by someone and not left on the porch.
- See if the post office or store the product is being shipped from can hold the package for pickup.
- The post office will allow your package to remain safe and secure for up to 30 days.



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