



Baltimore County Police Department

“Holiday Safety Tips for Everyone”

Street criminals look for an easy mark. Not necessarily the oldest or weakest, but the easiest. People who look preoccupied are at a greater risk of becoming a victim. No one consciously invites a robbery, but victims send signals that tell the assailant “I’m an easy target.”

Walking with a fixed up or down gaze, implies preoccupation. Acting distracted is one of the reasons why tourists are often victimized. Stand tall and walk confidently. Show you’re alert by looking from side to side and scanning the area around you.

If someone threatens you with a weapon, give up your purse, wallet, or vehicle without hesitation. Your personal safety is far more important than your possessions. The following lists are crime prevention tips that can be applied not only during the holidays, but also on a day to day basis:

When Shopping:

- Keep gifts and valuables out of sight in your car. Lock your packages in the trunk.
- At night park in a well-lighted area, and remember where you’ve parked.
- Shop with a friend, especially at night. If you are alone try to walk near other people.
- If you feel uncomfortable walking to your vehicle, ask store security to escort you.
- Lock your doors immediately after entering your vehicle.
- Carry a purse close to your body. Place wallets in your front pants pocket, instead of a back or jacket pocket.
- Have your keys ready to enter your vehicle when you approach it.
- Stay alert and be aware of what is going on around you.

- Don't overburden yourself with packages.
- Shopping with kids? Teach them to go to a store clerk, security guard, or police officer if you get separated.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. Pay with a check or credit card whenever possible.

In The Mall:

- Carry only receipts and small change in your purse.
- Never let your child use a public restroom alone; these are favorite places for offenders who harm children.
- Never use a video arcade or toy store as a baby sitter. Offenders are on the prowl for unattended children. Malls and shopping centers are prime locations for abductions according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).
- If you take a break in a restaurant or restroom, don't place purse or packages on the floor.
- Avoid using bathrooms that are tucked away in a back area of a mall concourse or department. If you can, find a bathroom near the mall's food court or highly populated area.
- Make your most expensive purchases last. This will reduce your exposure to costly losses.

Credit Card Precautions:

- Make sure the clerk uses your card for only one transaction. Watch transactions carefully. Be aware of card skimming.
- Never give out information about your credit card to any phone solicitor.
- Immediately report the theft or loss of credit cards.
- Never give out your social security number to a phone solicitor or store clerk.
- Do not carry your social security card in your wallet or purse. Keep it at home in a secure location.
- Do not use your credit card to purchase items on the Internet unless you initiate the contact and make sure the site is secure and encrypted.
- Cancel all credit cards that you haven't used in the last six months. Open credit accounts with a zero balance are prime targets for identity theft.

When Driving Around Town:

- Keep your vehicle doors locked at all times. Carjackers often target vehicles at stop signs and traffic lights.
- Drive in the center lane to make it harder for would-be carjackers to approach your vehicle.
- At intersections leave room between your vehicle and others for an escape.
- Don't stop to help someone with car trouble, use your cell phone to call police.
- Don't stop for flashing headlights. Police don't use this method to stop vehicles.
- If your car breaks down, stay inside until police or a road service arrives.
- If you are driving in an isolated/remote area, and someone motions to you that your vehicle has a problem, or if your vehicle is bumped by another vehicle, be suspicious of the event. Stay in your vehicle and call 911. It may be necessary to get the other drivers attention, and motion to him to follow you. Drive to a gas station, convenience store, or highly populated area before exiting your vehicle.

When Parking:

- Park in well lit areas where there is plenty of pedestrian traffic.
- Wait until you get to your vehicle, before deactivating your alarm. Deactivating the alarm prior to arriving at your vehicle; will give a criminal your intended destination.
- If you feel that you are being followed to your vehicle, re-enter the store and have security escort you to your vehicle.
- When you arrive at your vehicle, look under and in the back seat of your car before entering.

Safety at the ATM:

- Whenever possible, use ATMs during the day.
- Avoid using ATMs late at night; most ATM crimes occur after normal banking hours.
- If you need to use an ATM at night, use one inside a busy establishment.
- Before using an outside ATM, make sure no one is loitering in the area..."Be aware of your surroundings."

- Use only well lit, secure ATM locations.
- Make sure you block the view of others nearby when you enter your personal identification number (PIN).
- After the transaction be sure to remove your card from the ATM, take receipts with you, and quickly place your card and money in your pocket.
- Do not count your money at the ATM. Criminals have been known to watch ATM transactions and size-up potential victims.
- If you are followed after making an ATM transaction, go immediately to a heavily populated, well-lighted area and call the police.
- If you are attacked at an ATM don't resist. Cooperate and give up your money, then notify the police.

When Traveling:

- Leave a house key with a trusted neighbor.
- Make your home look occupied. Use timers on your lights, radios and TVs.
- Do not stop newspaper and mail delivery. Have a friend or trusted neighbor pick up your newspaper and mail each day.
- Have a neighbor park their car in your driveway while you're away.
- Plan your route in advance and choose well-traveled roads.
- Tell someone where you are going, the route you are taking, and your expected times of departure and arrival.
- Become aware of the latest weather reports for your local area, the route you will be traveling, and your destination.

In a Hotel/Motel:

- Use all locking devices on your door.
- Don't answer a knock on the door (or open the door) without verifying who is there.
- Ensure all sliding glass doors, windows, and any connecting room doors are locked.
- Don't display room keys or swipe cards in public or leave them where someone can steal them.
- When returning to your room late at night, use the hotel main entrance.
- Report all suspicious activity to the hotel management.
- Don't draw attention to yourself by displaying large amounts of cash or wearing expensive jewelry. Place all valuables in a hotel/motel safe.

Safety At Home:

- Keep all doors and windows locked. Even when you're home.
- Don't leave spare keys under doormats, in flowerpots, or any other hiding places in close proximity to your entrance doors.
- If someone unknown knocks on your door or rings the doorbell, talk through the door but don't open it. Some burglars will wait for a response, and if there is none will break into the house.
- Install a 180-degree door viewer, and use it.
- Arrange exterior plantings to allow for natural surveillance of the property from inside and outside your home.
- Maintain your property. Property that is not maintained invites crimes.
- Take advantage of "free" security surveys offered by the Baltimore County Police Department.
- Organize a neighborhood "Citizen on Patrol" group.

Identity Theft:

- File a police report. Get a copy of the report to submit to your creditors and others that may require proof of the crime.
- File your complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC maintains a database of identity theft cases used by law enforcement agencies for investigations.
- Contact the fraud departments of any one of the three major credit bureaus to place a fraud alert on your credit file. The fraud alert requests creditors to contact you before opening any new accounts or making any changes to your existing accounts. Close the accounts that you know or believe have been tampered with or opened fraudulently.

If you have any questions or concerns about this article, contact the Baltimore County Police Department's Community Services Section (Detective Bryan Dietsch) @ 410-887-5901.