

CRIME PREVENTION TIPS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The holiday season is a busy time of year, and a time when people are especially vulnerable to theft and other crimes. The following tips are designed to reduce your chances of becoming a victim of crime this holiday season and all year round.

- **STAY ALERT** to your surroundings and the people around you. If you see someone who looks suspicious, loitering in a parking structure/lot, or the outside of a store, leave the area and notify the police and/or security. If possible, park your vehicle in a well-lit area of high pedestrian activity.
 - Lock your car and close your windows, even if you are gone for only a few minutes
 - Don't leave valuables in plain view; conceal them under the seat or in your trunk.
 - Even a purse or diaper bag left unattended is an opportunity for a thief.
 - Every year purses, wallets, laptop computers, and cell phones are stolen from vehicles. In most cases the vehicle is locked with the item laying in plain view. In some cases the vehicle is left unlocked.
 - Place your valuables in the trunk **BEFORE** you get to your destination, not after, a thief may be watching you.
 - Always lock your vehicle; many criminals check doors to see if they're unlocked.
 - Carry a cell phone for emergencies. Carry it in your pocket rather than purse in the event of theft or robbery.
 - If you have to wait for a ride from a friend or public transportation, do so in busy, well-lit locations.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. Pay for purchases with a check or credit card when possible; and if the credit card receipt has carbons, ask for these too.
- Notify credit card companies immediately if your credit card is lost, stolen, or misused.
- Always report a theft to the police.
- When shopping with your children, teach them to go to the store clerk and ask for help if you become separated. They should never go to the parking lot or car alone.
- Inattentiveness is an easy target for a pickpocket.
 - Carry a purse that can be secured, making it a difficult target for criminals
 - A wallet carried in your back pocket is an easy target for a pickpocket and can be removed without your knowledge. A rubber band around your wallet can make it easier to detect the wallet being removed from the back pocket. Consider carrying your wallet in a front pocket of your pants and place a comb in the fold of the wallet.

- After you have completed a purchase, make sure you place your wallet and all of your credit cards back in your purse or pocket.
- Avoid overloading yourself with packages. It is important to have clear visibility and freedom of motion when you are out.
- When using an ATM/credit card for purchases, use the credit card, not the PIN. This can help avoid being caught up in skimming machines that capture PIN numbers.
- At home, be extra cautious about locking doors and windows when you leave the house, even for a few minutes.
 - Use timers to turn on a radio and lights when you are not at home, this will give the appearance that someone is there.
 - Avoid displaying holiday gifts and other valuables so that they are easily seen from your windows or doors.
 - Always keep your porch light on from dusk to dawn.
- If you go away for the holidays, make your home look like someone is home.
 - Get an automatic timer for your lights.
 - Have a neighbor watch your home and pick-up your newspapers and mail.
 - Don't advertise that you are out of town on your phone's message machine.
 - Install a photocell or timer on all porch lights so that they turn on and off from dusk to dawn.
 - Secure your garage door with a cane bolt or pad lock.
- If you use lights on your tree, make sure that they are in good working order, and never leave them on when you are gone.
- After opening gifts immediately mark them with your driver's license number, note all serial numbers, and keep these records in a safe place.

*Remember to be a good friend and neighbor this holiday season: Share these tips with your family and neighbors. Don't forget the elderly and other people who might be especially lonely during the holidays. And lastly, when hosting a party, find alternative transportation for intoxicated guests; and when going out drinking, please remember: **DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE.***

Holiday Safety Tips provided by the Costa Mesa Police Department's
Crime Prevention Unit.
