



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

A STATE ACCREDITED LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

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Media Release

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Re: Holiday Safety Tips From the Hernando County Sheriff's Office

Date: November 21, 2011

For many of us the holiday season is normally a joyous but busy time of the year. We often get caught up in the hustle and bustle and tend to let down our guard as we scramble to make the final holiday preparations. Criminals, unfortunately, know this all too well and prey on distracted and vulnerable citizens. Hopefully, the following tips will help you to have a festive and crime-free holiday season.

Christmas shopping safety tips:

- When in a public facility, always supervise your children and ALWAYS accompany young children to the restroom. Make certain your children know to stay with you at all times while shopping and always CHECK FIRST with you, or the person in charge, before they go anywhere. It is important to know where your children are and who they are with at all times.
- If older children become separated from you while holiday shopping, have them meet you in a predetermined spot, such as the sales counter of the store where you plan to shop or the mall's information booth. For younger children, teach them to look for people who can be sources of help within the store or mall, such as a uniformed security officer, salesperson with a name tag, the person in the information booth, or a uniformed law-enforcement officer. They should NEVER leave the store/mall or go to the parking lot to look for you or your car.
- If you allow your older children to go to the mall or other activities without you, they need to TAKE A FRIEND. It's not only more fun, but much safer. Older children should check in with you on a regular basis while they are out. Make certain a clear plan is in place to pick them up including where, when, and what to do in case of a change in plans.

Vehicle and parking lot safety tips:

- Always park in well-lit areas, even if you do not have intentions of walking to your car after dark.
- Keep your keys in your hand and pay attention to your surroundings while walking to your vehicle. Remember potential perpetrators do not like eye contact.
- Check both the backseat and underneath the vehicle before entering the car.
- Don't clip any type of identification to your rearview mirrors or other plain view locations. Those items could become a valuable target for identify theft.
- Lock your vehicle and close all windows.
- Take your keys with you. (Don't hide a set of keys anywhere on your vehicle.)
- Activate any anti-theft devices you have.
- Never leave your engine running even if you will be stepping away from the vehicle for just a minute.
- Conceal all valuables, including cell phones and GPS devices. Some burglars target GPS devices and look for a "Home" addresses. While the unsuspected victim is shopping, the burglar can respond to the "Home" address and commit another burglary.

Banking and ATM safety tips:

- Protect your PIN number. Don't carry it in your purse or wallet.
- Photocopy the front and back of your credit/debit cards and keep that information in a safe place. If they are lost or stolen, you will then have quick and easy access to the information needed.
- Review bank and credit card statements as soon as they come in. Report any discrepancies immediately.

Answering machine safety tips:

- Do NOT use voices of children or their names on answering machines. It allows predators the knowledge that children live in the household.
- If you are a female living alone, have a male friend or neighbor set up your outgoing messages.
- Don't say "You have reached 352-XXX-XXXX (your phone number) or "We are not home to take your call." Instead consider saying "We are unavailable to take your call at this time, please leave a message." (Say "we" even if you live alone).

Tips to protect your mail:

- It is not uncommon for thieves to open mailboxes during the holiday season looking for Christmas cards with cash and/or gift cards. Thieves may also be looking for bank statements and other personal information with intent to commit identity theft.
- To avoid having outgoing mail from being stolen, put your mail in your mailbox shortly before your mail is scheduled for delivery/pickup. (Your mail carrier usually delivers mail about the same time everyday).
- Open a post office box at a nearby post office.
- Never put outgoing mail in your mailbox overnight. Your flag up is a good indication you have outgoing mail, which may include cards or bills with account information.

“The Hernando County Sheriff’s Office works 24 hours a day, every day of the year, in an attempt to provide a safe environment for you and your family, no matter where you are in Hernando County. Many times criminal acts can be prevented if we just follow a few of these common sense precautions,” said Sheriff Al Nienhuis. “The entire Hernando County Sheriff’s Office family and I want you to have only fond memories of the 2011 holiday season.”