



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

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Re: Holiday Travel and Safety Tips

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For many of us the holidays are a very busy and festive time of the year. It is a time when we find ourselves shopping and decorating and even planning a joyful holiday gathering for friends and family. Criminals, unfortunately, know this all too well and are preparing just the same.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis and the men and women of the Hernando County Sheriff's Office work diligently, every day of the year, in an effort to provide a safe environment for the citizens of Hernando County.

"No one looks forward to the holidays more than criminals. Unfortunately, it is also a busy time for those businesses and organizations that respond to tragedy. Please don't let the holiday season distract you into becoming a victim of a crime or other tragedy. Staying focused on personal safety is never more important than during the months of November and December. If we all take a moment to follow these safety tips, the holidays will be merry and bright for everyone, except of course for the criminals in our community," said Sheriff Al Nienhuis.

We have taken some time to prepare the following holiday travel and safety tips in order to help you have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

Travel Safety Tips

- Vehicles should be in good working order before heading out
- Remember to pack emergency supplies (blankets, water, snacks, flashlight, and a first aid kit)
- Do not drink and drive and do not allow someone else to drink and drive
- Wear a seatbelt every time you operate or ride in a motor vehicle

- Always buckle children in a child safety seat, a booster seat or a seatbelt according to his/her height, weight, and age
- Know where you are going and how to get there and back
 - o Obtain or download a map
 - o Carry a GPS
 - o Check for construction detours
 - o For longer trips, obtain a weather forecast
- Inform a family member or friend where you will be and when you expect to return. Give them your route of travel if you know it
- Travel and conduct business during daylight hours if possible
- If you have a cellular phone, carry or take it (but do not use it while driving; this is unlawful in some states)
- Keep doors locked while driving
- Maintain at least 1/2 tank of fuel and keep the vehicle in good repair
- **The single most essential safety tip – devote your full-time attention to driving**

Shopping Safety Tips

- Shop with friends or relatives – there is safety in numbers
- Remain alert in crowded places
- Always supervise children, especially when going to the restroom
- Small children should know their first and last name so they can tell a person of authority if they become lost
- If a child becomes separated from you, have a predetermined plan where you will meet or what you will do (have them seek out a store clerk or a security guard). The child should NEVER go outside to look for you or wait by the car
- If older children go to the mall (or other activities) without you, you should know where they are at all times and they should check in with you by phone, frequently – they should not go alone
- Using a debit or credit card is much safer than carrying a lot of cash

Vehicle and Parking Lot Safety Tips

- If possible, do not leave items (valuables) in plain view in your vehicle
- If you must leave items in your vehicle, place them out of sight (in the trunk) before you arrive at your destination
- Lock the GPS, iPod, etc. in the glove compartment. Lock up the docking station(s) and the connector cables too
- Do not leave loose change, briefcases, backpacks, gym bags, lap-top computers, cell phones, day planners, etc. in vehicles as these items are some of the most commonly stolen in vehicle burglaries
- Park in well-lit, busy areas
- Lock all doors every time you exit the vehicle
- Set the alarm or the anti-theft device
- Keep your keys in your hand and remain alert to your surroundings – Criminals do not like eye contact
- Check the trunk (to be sure it is locked), the back seat and under the vehicle before you get in it
- Do not clip or hang any identification tag to the rearview mirror – these can be targeted items for identity theft
- Do not hide your key on your vehicle while you are shopping – take it with you
- Never leave your engine running for any reason while you are away from the vehicle

- Avoid placing your HOME address in your GPS in case it gets stolen – this allows the suspect to go to your home while you are still shopping

Banking and ATM Safety Tips

- If there is anyone suspicious at or near the ATM, select another ATM
- Use the “fisheye” mirror (if one is provided) to see what is going on behind you
- If followed, call 9-1-1
- Use the drive-up instead of going in to the bank branch
- Protect your PIN number – do not carry it with you
- Photocopy the front/back of your credit and debit cards and keep that information in a safe place. If they are lost or stolen you will have easy access to the information
- Review bank and credit card statements promptly and report discrepancies

Home Safety Tips

- Keep the doors and windows locked
- If you receive large and or costly gifts (not just during the holidays) cut up the boxes and turn them inside out before placing them out at the curb for removal. *You do not want to advertise that you just got a new 55 inch television!*
- Set the alarm when not at home
- Do not use voices and names of children on the answering machine – this allows predators the knowledge that children live in your home
- If you are a female living alone, leave the generic outgoing message on the machine
- Watch for the mail, thieves tend to look in mailboxes for checks and cash in Christmas cards
- Mail outgoing mail at the post office to avoid having it stolen – never put outgoing mail in your mailbox overnight
- Consider opening a post office box during the holiday season

Cooking Safety

- Cooking is the leading cause of home fires and related injuries. Follow these safety tips to avoid fire/injury:
 - o Keep children and pets at least three feet away from the cooking area
 - o Clean all cooking surfaces to prevent grease buildup
 - o Remain in the kitchen while frying, grilling or broiling food. Turn burners off when leaving the kitchen
 - o Keep a pan lid or a baking sheet nearby. Use it to cover the pan if it catches fire.
 - o Place turkey fryers OUTSIDE and away from the house, the deck, an/or the garage

Health Safety Tips

- Manage Stress
 - o Balance work, home and play and get support from family and friends
- Wash Hands Often
 - o Keeping your hands clean is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs
- Stay Warm
 - o Cold temperatures can cause serious health issues, especially in infants and older adults.

Happy Holidays!

The Office of Sheriff:

The Office of the Sheriff is established by the Florida Constitution. As a constitutional officer, the Sheriff has the exclusive authority to administer his or her agency and is responsible for preserving the peace throughout the entire county, carrying out the laws of the state, the orders of Florida courts, and the ordinances of the Board of County Commissioners. The Sheriff is the chief law enforcement and correctional officer of the county.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis was initially appointed as the Sheriff of Hernando County by the Governor in January of 2011. He was then elected by the people of Hernando County in 2012, and remains accountable to them.