



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

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Re: Holiday Travel and Safety Tips - 2021

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The holidays can be both a very busy and festive time of year. Many of us are decorating, planning holiday meals, shopping in stores and online, and trying to maintain order in our daily routines. Unfortunately, as we plan and prepare for the holiday season, criminals are preparing for the season as well.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis and the men and women of the Hernando County Sheriff's Office work diligently during the holiday season, and every day of the year, to provide a safe environment for every citizen in Hernando County.

There is zero tolerance for criminal activity in Hernando County!

Each year we take some time to prepare some holiday travel and safety tips (listed below) in order to help you stay safe while enjoying this holiday season.

Travel Safety

- Vehicle should be in good working order
- Pack emergency supplies (blankets, water, snacks, flashlight, first-aid kit)
- Do not drink and drive
- Wear a seatbelt
- Always buckle children in a child safety seat, booster seat, or seatbelt – according to age/height/weight
- Know where you're going and how to get there (map, GPS, check for construction/detours, check weather)
- Inform a family member or friend where you will be/when you will return (provide your route of travel, if possible)
- Travel and conduct business during daylight hours, if possible
- Take a cellphone with you (do not use while driving)
- Keep doors locked while driving

- Maintain at least ½ tank of fuel and keep the vehicle in good repair
- Most importantly, driver should devote 100% attention to driving.

Shopping Safety

- Shop with friends or relatives – there is safety in numbers
- Remain alert and aware of your surroundings
- Always supervise children, especially when going to the restroom
- Small children should know their own first and last name and the name of a parent/caregiver
- Discuss a plan with children regarding what to do/where to meet if they should become separated from you – Children should seek out a store clerk or security guard – Children should not go outside to look for you or to wait by the car
- If older children go shopping without an adult, a parent or caregiver should know where they are at all times and they should check in by phone, frequently
- Using a debit card or credit card is much safer than carrying a large amount of cash.

Vehicle and Parking Lot Safety

- Do not leave valuables in plain view in your vehicle
- Place items out of sight and/or in the trunk before arriving at your destination
- Place electronic equipment (docking stations, cables, etc.) in the glove compartment
- Don't leave loose change, briefcases, backpacks, gym bags, laptop computers, cell phones in vehicles - these items are targeted in Vehicle Burglaries
- Don't leave firearms in unlocked vehicles
- Park in areas that are well-lit and busy
- **Lock all doors every time you exit the vehicle**
- If the vehicle is equipped with an alarm/anti-theft device, set it
- Keep vehicle keys in your hand and remain alert – Criminals don't like eye contact
- Check underneath the vehicle and the back seat before you get in it
- Don't clip or hand ID tags to the rearview mirror – these can be targeted for ID theft
- Don't hide your key on your vehicle while you're shopping
- Don't leave your engine running while you are away from your vehicle
- Avoid adding your HOME address into your GPS (in case it gets stolen).

Banking and ATM Safety

- If you are uncomfortable with the presence of any person or vehicle near the ATM – select another ATM
- Call 9-1-1 if circumstances require
- Use the “fisheye” mirror (if provided) to observe what is occurring behind you
- Use the drive-up instead of going inside the bank branch
- Protect your PIN – You should not carry it with you
- Photocopy the front/back of your credit cards and keep this information in a safe place – If a card is lost or stolen, you will have easy access to the information needed
- Review bank and credit card statements promptly and report discrepancies.

Home Safety

- Make it a habit to keep doors and windows locked
- If you receive large (or costly) gifts, cut up the boxes and turn them inside out before placing them at the curb for removal – Don't let criminals know how big your brand new TV is
- Set the alarm and/or monitor security cameras when you are not home

- Do not use voices and names of children on the outgoing message for your voicemail
 - Predators do not need to know the names of your children
- Females who live alone should leave a generic outgoing message
- Watch for the mail delivery – Criminals are looking for cash and gift cards
- Mail any 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 holidays.

Cooking Safety

Cooking is the leading cause of residential fires and related injuries. Follow these safety tips to avoid fire/injury:

- Keep children and pets at least three feet from cooking areas
- Clean all cooking areas/surfaces to prevent grease build-up
- Remain in the kitchen while frying, grilling, or broiling food
- Turn burners off before leaving the kitchen
- Keep a pan lid or a baking sheet nearby – Use it to cover a pan if it catches fire
- Use turkey fryers OUTSIDE only – Be sure the fryer is away from the house, deck, patio, etc.

Health Safety

- COVID-19
 - Remain mindful of CDC guidelines (physical distancing, masks, gatherings, etc.) and do what is best for you and your family
 - Wash your hands often
 - Consult a medical professional if you feel sick
- Manage Stress
 - Balance work, home, and play – Get support from family and friends
 - Take a break when needed
 - Don't take on more than you can handle
- Stay Warm
 - Cold temperatures can cause serious health issues, especially in infants and older adults
 - If using a space heater – Be aware of fire hazards
 - Be sure to turn it off when leaving the room or going to bed
 - Don't lay anything on or near the heater.

Happy Holidays from our family to yours!

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, ran unopposed in 2016, and was re-elected in 2020. Sheriff Nienhuis remains accountable to the people of Hernando County.