

MELBOURNE BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

MESSAGE FROM CHIEF DAN DUNCAN

Holiday Crime Prevention

This holiday season don't let the spirit of giving deceive you into giving burglars, muggers, and pickpockets a better chance to do their dirty work. Crooks love the holidays as much as everyone else, especially because it's an opportune time for crime.

Here are some tips from the Melbourne Beach Police Department on how to celebrate safely this holiday season:

If You Are Out for the Evening

- Turn on lights and a radio or TV so it looks like someone's home.
- Be extra cautious about locking doors and windows when you leave, even if it's just for a few minutes.
- Don't display gifts where they can be seen from outside.

If You Are Traveling

- Get an automatic timer for your lights.
- Ask a neighbor to watch your home, and park in the driveway from time to time.
- Don't forget to have mail and newspaper delivery stopped. If it piles up, it's a sure sign you're gone.

If You Are Shopping

- Stay alert and be aware of what's going on around you.
- Park in a well-lighted space, and be sure to close the windows and lock the car.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash; pay with a check or credit card whenever possible.
- Deter pickpockets and purse-snatchers. Don't overburden yourself with packages. Be extra careful with purses and wallets. Carry a purse close to your body, not dangling by the straps. Put a wallet in an inside coat or front pants pocket.
- Shopping with kids? Teach them to go to a store clerk or security guard if you get separated.

Protect Your Vehicle

- Loading up on all those gifts is a sign of progress in the holiday shopping, but if those packages are left out in the open after they're in the car, your car has become a likely target for thieves. Remember the old cliché "Out of sight, out of mind?" The same idea applies to items in your car.
- Always lock your vehicle and store all items out of sight. Breaking into an empty car isn't worth a thief's time. However, anything left in plain view – from your holiday gifts to spare change, sunglasses, CDs, cell phones or briefcases – may tempt a thief.

- **Help prevent your vehicle from being stolen by always locking your car and using anti-theft devices. And never leave your vehicle running while you run inside your home or a store – even if for only a minute or two.**

If a Stranger Comes to the Door

Criminals sometimes pose as couriers delivering gifts. And it's not uncommon for people to try to take advantage of others' generosity during the holidays by going door-to-door for charitable donations when there is no charity involved. Ask for identification, and find out how the funds will be used. If you aren't satisfied, don't give. Help a charitable organization you know and like instead.

After you've opened the Gifts

Burglars know that many households have new, and oftentimes expensive, items in their homes following the December holidays – especially items such as new computers and peripherals, stereo components, televisions, cameras and other electronic equipment. In too many cases, residents make it easy for burglars to figure out which homes to target by putting boxes that identify their new gifts in plain view with their other garbage.

Avoid becoming an easy target for post-holiday burglars by not leaving boxes for new electronics and other items in plain view or other garbage pick-up locations for several days at a time. Instead, break down any boxes you are throwing out, put them in garbage bags and place them inside a trash can. (In many cases, especially with computer equipment, you might consider keeping the boxes for safe storage, shipping or moving in the future.) Think about keeping broken-down boxes inside – in a garage, for example – until the evening before your regular garbage pick-up. Some burglars actually look inside garbage cans for evidence of holiday gifts.

And, of course, if you see someone suspicious casing your home, call the Melbourne Beach Police Department's non-emergency number, (321) 773-7212. If you see a burglary in progress, call 911.

Take a Holiday Inventory

The holidays are a good time to update – or create – your home inventory. Take photos or make videos of items, and list descriptions and serial numbers. If your home is burglarized, having a detailed inventory can help identify stolen items and make insurance claims easier to file.

Make sure things like TVs, VCRs, stereo equipment, cameras, camcorders, sports equipment, jewelry, silver, computers, home office equipment, and power tools are on the list. Remember to check it twice!

Celebrate Responsibly

The holiday season is a time of celebration and revelry. Drinking and driving is a danger to everyone on the road. Remember that the risk isn't worth it—if you choose to drink alcohol at a party, don't drive. Take a cab, use public transportation or a designated driver. Have fun, but remember to celebrate responsibly.

