

How to avoid becoming a target for crime

As the festive season rapidly approaches, the opportunist thief will be preparing to take advantage of the fact that we are all too busy getting ready for the celebrations and perhaps not being as security conscious as we usually are. Suffering a crime over the holiday period has the potential to ruin what should be a happy occasion.

Do you know? In one in three burglaries, the thief didn't have to force entry into a home. Residents simply left windows or a door open when they went out or were in another part of the home! Prevention therefore doesn't have to cost money. Closing windows, locking an external door whilst you are in, or moving car keys so they can't be fished through the letterbox, will all help.

Remember

- Make the home look occupied. Burglars do not want to be seen or disturbed. Convincing them that someone is at home is undoubtedly the best deterrent.
- Make sure that you lock all outside doors and windows and, if you have a burglar alarm, make sure it is set (even if you only pop out for a few minutes).
- Use automatic timer-switches to turn your lights on when it goes dark. You can convince any potential burglar that you are at home by having plug-in timer controls for lamps.
- Don't just have the hall light switched on when you're not in.
- Have the lights switching themselves on in the bedroom, kitchen and lounge. This is important in the dark winter afternoons as well as evenings. You could also arrange for your curtains to be closed in your absence by a trusted neighbour.
- A plug-in timer for the radio would make it sound as if someone was home. Tune the radio to a station that has more talking than music.

Protect your Vehicle

- Car crime is often thought to be committed by sophisticated high-tech criminals. In reality most of the crimes are opportunistic. The thieves simply wander around looking for any item left on show and then steal it by smashing a window.
- Similarly, older cars with no additional security devices are stolen using basic techniques, whilst more modern cars tend to be stolen by first stealing the keys.
- Always keep your vehicle locked (including windows) even if you only leave it for a few seconds.
- Get into the habit of not leaving any item in the car. The cost of replacing a broken window is often far more than the value of goods stolen. If you can, take your belongings with you rather than leaving them in the car.
- Don't leave keys in a coat pocket and leave the coat unattended. And be aware of dropping keys into bags or briefcases where they might remain visible.

Personal Safety

- Walk confidently and be aware of your surroundings (no personal music devices or phone calls!). This will put off many attackers.
- Wearing a shoulder bag with the flap facing you and the strap over both your arm and head rather than just over the shoulder or arm could reduce the chances of theft.
- Always leave a club or pub with a friend and let someone know where you are. Make plans beforehand on how you are going to get home and what time. It is always sensible to arrange a lift home with a friend, husband, wife or partner.
- If you have to telephone for a taxi, always try to use a firm you know. If you have a mobile phone, programme in the number. Don't get into a private hire taxi (they look like a normal car) unless you have booked the car first. Only hackney carriages (traditional black cabs) are insured to carry passengers who have flagged them down. Always sit in the back, preferably behind the driver.
- On public transport try to sit near the driver and avoid vacant compartments on trains. If you are pestered by someone, complain to the driver or guard. They can get help by radio, telephone or alarm depending on the type of transport. Some buses and taxis have CCTV installed.
- If you have no choice but to walk alone at night, it is best not to take any shortcuts through dimly lit areas. Also it is wiser to walk facing the oncoming traffic where you can be seen and avoid the surprise of a vehicle approaching from behind.

