

BENSALEM TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT
HOLIDAY SHOPPING
&
GENERAL SAFETY
TIPS

The Holiday Season, and shopping in general, present Criminals with unlimited opportunities to get what they want most...your money, property or You! When out shopping, using an ATM, going to use your car, out for a jog/walk or home alone, by taking a few preventative steps, you can make yourself less likely to be a victim. Criminals are Predators. They look for people who appear helpless, lost or completely unaware of their surroundings.

HOME.

- A) Windows- If you live in a first or ground level apartment, keep them **LOCKED** unless you are in that room at the time. The same goes for houses. If you are not going to be home, lock your windows. If you have a sliding window/door, it is well worth the money to buy the "floor lock" or the locking bar, to prevent someone from breaking into your home. The simple latches that come with these doors are very easy to defeat, and can be done quietly. Inexpensive motion sensing alarms can be set in place to go off if someone tries to come through the window (positioning can be tricky if you have pets). Remember, screens were meant to keep out bugs...not criminals!
- B) Doors- Use the lock on your door, even if you are home. Home Invasions are not pleasant, and can be deadly. If they are not afraid of coming in while you are there, they will not be concerned with your well being. You are a live witness, and are therefore a liability to them! If you are in the backyard, lock the front door. If you are in the front yard, lock the back door. What is better than one lock? Two locks! A deadbolt lock is far superior to the chain lock because it re-enforces the structure of the door to the jamb itself. The chain style is easily broken, or slipped off. If you garage is attached to your home, keep your garage door locked. It is very easy to enter the garage, close the door, and

begin working on the door that goes into your home, completely unnoticed (assuming you locked it!). If you have an automatic garage door opener, make sure you lock the door leading to your house (another good spot for a deadbolt lock).

- C) Outside Lighting- Criminals, for the most part, do not want to be seen. Putting on a porch/deck light, or installing motion sensing lights, can allow you to see outside, from the safety of being inside. Criminals love the dark...take it away from them!
- D) Inside Lighting- Using timers that can be set for staggered times, rather than the same time every day, can give the appearance that someone is home.
- E) Outside Shrubbery- Trim or remove any plant/tree that provides cover in front of a window. If it blocks a view of the window from the street, no one can see a criminal breaking in, especially Police Officers driving by (or your neighbors).
- F) Trash Day- Why were you surprised that the criminal broke in, and stole your brand new flat screen TV... You put the box down by the curb! If you do not want to advertise to the world what is inside your house, do not put it in plain view. Hide it, shred it, or cover it before you put it out for the trash pick up.
- G) Home Alarm Systems- If you can afford one, they can be another tool that makes your home less likely to be broken into.

AUTOMOBILES.

- A) Windows- If the window is open, so is your vehicle. Close your windows. Criminals can see into the car, so why would you leave your purse, Laptop, wallet, digital camera, GPS system...etc., laying out in plain view. It takes 5-10 seconds to smash a window, and remove these items. Now you missing your property, and you need to replace a window. Take it with you, put it in the trunk or hide it really well. This takes less time than filling out a police report, contacting your insurance agent and replacing the window.
- B) Doors- If the door is unlocked, it just makes it easier for the car to be stolen, or your property removed. Lock your doors.
- C) Parking- Park in a well lit area if at all possible. Look to see if the area has surveillance cameras, and try to park around them. If you find there is a van parked on the driver side of your vehicle, get into your vehicle on the passenger side, or wait for it to leave. **Your back is turned as you enter from the driver side, making it very easy to grab you from behind and pull you into the van. **BE AWARE OF YOUR

SURROUNDINGS. * * If it looks like someone is waiting by your car, do not go to your car directly. Make eye contact with them, and let them know they have been noticed, then walk away and wait. If you are at the Mall, ask for a Security Guard to walk you to it. If you are parked in an elevated garage, use the elevator, not the stairs. Stairwells are perfect “ambush” spots for criminals.

- D) Packages- If you take your packages to your vehicle, do not go back in to shop unless you move your car. I know “but it’s a great spot!!” ...is the reason that criminals watch to see who is dropping off their packages. As soon as you leave, they will be at your car, breaking in and taking them. Get in your car, and drive around the parking lot to a different spot, then park. Criminals will see you get in and drive away, crossing you off their list because you are “leaving”. Let them think that. Do Not just drive a few spaces over, and re-park...they are criminals, they are not stupid!
- E) Sitting in Your Car- After you get into your car, drive away. Do not sit in the car and fill out your checkbook, chat on your cell phone, clean out your purse...etc. You are not paying attention and you are making yourself a Target!
- F) Breaking Down- Try to let someone know where you are going, your route of travel and when you expect to be home. If you don’t show up, it lets them know where to look for you. Until help arrives, keep your doors locked. Have a fully charged cell phone handy to call for assistance. Don’t wear the battery down talking on it to kill time. If your hazard lights are on, and the engine is not running, the cars battery will be draining quickly...so a phone charger won’t work! Keep an Emergency kit in the vehicle (water, snacks, first-aid kit, flares, blanket, flashlight, batteries). If someone pulls up and asks if they can call someone to come and help you, remain in the car. If they are really there to help, they will understand. If they insist that you get out of the vehicle, tell them you have already called for help, and that they will be there soon...Do Not Get Out of The Car! If they appear to be looking for a way to get in, start honking the horn while calling 9-1-1. Draw attention to the situation.

SHOPPING.

- A) Clothing- Wear comfortable clothing. If you can’t run in it, a criminal will notice that, and take advantage of the opportunity. Too baggy or too constricting can severely hinder your attempts to run, or defend yourself.

- B) Jewelry- It not only looks expensive to you and your loved ones...criminals think so too. You have to ask yourself, "Am I willing to give this up, or lose my Life, if I am robbed?". If the answer is "No", then do not wear it. In a perfect world, you would be able to wear whatever jewelry you wanted to...but then, you would not need to read these suggestions! If you can cover it with a collar, sleeve, mittens...etc., then you can probably wear it while you shop.
- C) Cash- Flashing large amounts of cash attracts criminals. If you pay for your items in cash, do it the smart way. Break down your cash into predetermined, smaller amounts. If you use your pockets to store your cash, then use the front pockets, but try not to use your coat pockets (you are less likely to feel someone going through them). Put your cash in different pockets, not ALL in one.
- D) Credit/Debit Cards- Only bring one or two credit/debit cards with you. This way, if one is taken from you while you are shopping, you will know immediately. Criminals who lift one or two cards out of a wallet full of cards, are betting you won't notice for awhile, and they can spend freely until you cancel the card.
- E) Checkbook- Keep this in your front pocket, close to your body, if at all possible., and "pat" it every so often to make sure it is there.
- F) Pocketbook/Purses- This will be a hard one for some people. If at all possible, Don't Bring It! True, you carry everything in it...EVERYTHING. That is why it is a great target for criminals. You have your cash/credit/keys/drivers license/social security card/medication in it. If you must bring your purse, keep it close to your body, and closed. Do not let it just hang loose on your shoulder, and do not leave it hanging or sitting on a dressing room hook/floor or chair. Do not leave it sitting unattended in a cart.
- G) ATMs- When using an ATM while shopping, always be aware of your surroundings. Maintain your "personal space", which is that area in which you feel uncomfortable if someone gets too close. Criminals like to see what your PIN number is, and do so by standing close by and watching...pay attention! If someone is that close, and they will not leave while you are there, Do Not Make a With-drawl! Use an ATM in a well lit area. If the ATM does not appear to be constructed correctly (odd faceplate, partially lifted up, an attachment over the front...etc.) Do Not Use It. Criminals will set these up, or set a device on them to "skim" your card information along with your PIN number.
- H) Packages- Okay...you know that if you take your packages to the car, you are going to have to move to another spot. Do not overload

yourself with packages to the point that you cannot see around you, or get to your keys quickly. You cannot be aware of your surroundings, if you cannot see.

- 1) Time of Day- If at all possible, try to shop during daylight hours. If not, try to shop around dinner time (5pm-7pm) when the stores are not quite packed yet.

Criminals are predators, and they are always counting on human nature to help them find victims. We tend to “over-task” ourselves when we leave our homes. We talk on cell phones, think about the next days events (school, work, meetings, soccer, karate...etc.) think about what we are going to buy, can I get a good parking space, am I at the right Mall and on and on. We walk right past the guy breaking into a parked car, or robbing a pedestrian, and we do not notice. We don't notice because we are always in a hurry. Here is how you can avoid becoming a victim.

- 1) Be aware of your surroundings. Mindlessly chatting on a cell phone while you walk/drive, prevents you from focusing. The cell phone is for emergencies!
- 2) Walk with your head up, and make eye contact with people around you. If they know you are aware of them, criminals will avoid you.
- 3) After you park, look around before you get out of your car, to see if anyone is standing too close. Remember where you parked. Wandering around aimlessly is an invitation for criminals to approach you.
- 4) Keep your young children close, and have a preset meeting place in case you get separated.
- 5) If confronted by an armed criminal, give them your property...but, **DO NOT GO WITH THEM!** If they try to make you leave a crowded area, start screaming and run the second you are able to pull free. If they try to get you into a vehicle, **DO NOT GO!** Once they have you in the vehicle, They Own You. Even if they are armed with a gun, running away and screaming does not guarantee that you will be shot and hit. Trained Police officers can have trouble hitting a moving target, criminals fare much worse when shooting at someone running away. Remember, resist when they are trying to take **YOU**, not your property!

- 6) Pepper Sprays, Mace and any chemical propellant, can give you the distance and time you need to get away from an attacker, but only if you have them readily available (key-chain sprays...etc.). "Stun-Guns" allow the attacker to get too close to you, and they do not knock them out like they do in the movies!
- 7) If you are grabbed, go for the eyes and throat, not the Groin! Blinding an attacker, or causing an airway problem, is not expected, where a "kick in the groin" usually is. Using your finger nails, palms, elbows, knees and heels to scratch, gouge, strike and kick an attacker will put them on the defensive. Get "Angry"!!

There are still plenty of good and decent people in this world. The purpose of these "Safety Tips" suggestions, is to let you enjoy them, while keeping you safe from the predators that are, unfortunately, out there as well. Please, be Safe!

WFS.