

Holiday shopping? Criminals are doing the same

It is not too early to think about holiday shopping. Many holiday shoppers start early. Unfortunately, so do the criminals. Criminals are window shopping just as you are. The difference is that you are window-shopping at the stores located in the malls and the thieves are window-shopping in your car windows. Don't make it easy for the criminals to reap the benefits of all your hard work. Here are a few tips for your shopping safety:

- Don't shop alone
- Look around and make sure that you are not being watched.

If you have a sports utility vehicle, cover your purchases up with a tarp.

■ Put all your purchases in the trunk of your car.

■ Move your car to another parking spot after dropping off your packages.

When you are shopping, keep your purchases in front of you so that a thief cannot pick them up easily. Consider sending your packages down to package pick-up so that you do not have to cart them around with you.

When paying with a credit card, keep your wallet in your hand until you get your credit

card back. Hopefully that way you will not walk away without your credit card. Never lay your purse down on the store counter unattended or on the floor in a restaurant or theater.

Grocery shopping? Do not leave your purse unattended in the cart. I have witnessed purses being left in a cart while consumers go back into the store to get something that they have forgotten. Luckily for them, they were not victimized. It only takes a second for that purse to disappear.

It's time to get on the elevator. The door opens and there is one stranger on the elevator. Do you get on? Perhaps you should wait

for another car or stand near the alarm button. Never ride to the basement if you don't attend to exit there.

Be suspicious of anyone who seems to be moving to the same counters or other areas as you move. If someone does attempt to grab your handbag, be prepared to deal with the situation in terms of your own life. If you are in a populated area, you may choose to resist. If you are in an isolated area, it may be wiser to let the snatcher take the purse. In either case, call the police immediately and provide them with a description.

This article is not only for women with purses. Men beware too. Picking a pocket requires different techniques. This usually happens in a crowded area. Men or women who carry valuables of any kind in outside pockets would do well to change that habit and keep wallets,

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Putting fashion aside, this is a good time to select the purse that you will be carrying according to the event and location.

Do not select a purse that looks too tempting or one that is easily snatched or cut. When carrying money in the purse, try not to carry large sums. Do not advertise the fact that you have a lot of money. Take out small amounts at a time. Walk briskly and be alert.

Keep your purse close to your side and be aware of your surroundings. Swinging a smartly fashioned purse with a long strap may look great, but it also looks great to a purse-snatcher! It would not take much effort for a thief to cut a long strap or give it a good pull with a strong arm and be off with your money.

This brings us to a personal safety thought as well. Shop with a friend or make sure that you walk out to your car with a security guard. Park close to the mall and try to do your shopping during the daylight hours. If this is not possible, park under a parking lot light.

Mall security would be happy to walk you out to your car or watch you get to your car. It would also be acceptable to ask a family if you can walk out with them. Generally, people are very thoughtful and would be happy to accompany you.

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