

CRIME PREVENTION

During holiday season, criminals are 'window shopping'

This holiday season don't let the spirit of giving turn into the spirit of giving burglars, muggers and pickpockets the opportunity to do their dirty work.

Criminals are window-shopping just as you are. The difference is that you are window-shopping in the malls and the thieves are window-shopping in your car windows.

Here are a few tips for 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 it.

■ Never lay your purse down unattended on the floor.

When using the elevator make sure there are several people on it. If there is only one other person, wait for another car. Never ride to the basement if you don't intend to exit there.

Be suspicious of anyone who seems to be moving to the same counters or other areas as you move. Hold your purse firmly; cover the clasp with your hand. Never carry a purse by the strap or loosely over your shoulder.

Remember to place your handbag on your lap when seated in public. Avoid hanging your purse on the door or placing it on the floor in public restrooms. Never leave your purse in a shopping cart unattended.

Put pickpockets out of business. Men or women who carry valuables of any kind in outside pockets would do well to change that habit and keep wallets, money-clips, credit cards, etc. in

inside jacket pockets.

Be alert for people in crowds who bump into you, drop money in front of you, or wear a coat or jacket draped over their shoulders (to hide their hands).

The new backpack purses look great. However, take caution when slinging them over your back. They are especially easy to pick if you do not close your backpack purse.

When carrying money in the purse, try not to carry large sums. Take out small amounts at a time.

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.

Consider coordinating shopping trips with a friend if you plan to be out late. Part close to the mall and try to do your shopping during the daylight hours, if possible. If this is not possible, park under a parking lot light.

If you feel comfortable, it would also be acceptable to ask a

family if you can walk out toward your car with them.

Most of these tips are common sense; however, we tend to take

a lot for granted. We never think anything bad is going to happen to us, until it does. An ounce of prevention ...

Juliet McGlinch is a crime prevention specialist with Farmington Hills Police Department.

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