



# WINTER IS COMING...

## HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS FROM UCPD



**This holiday season,** don't let the spirit of giving lull 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.

Homes jam-packed with glittering gifts. Stores, malls and downtown streets teeming with unsuspecting shoppers. People rushing around, stressed out and careless, looking for last-minute gifts, trying to get everything done. It's enough to make a crook giddy with holiday joy.

Here are some tips on how to celebrate safely this holiday season:

### If You Are Traveling

- Get an automatic timer for your lights.
- Ask a neighbor to watch your home, shovel snow, 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 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 Shopping

- Stay alert and be aware of what's going on around you.
- Park in a well-lighted space, and **be sure to lock the car, close the windows,** and hide shopping bags and gifts in the trunk.
- 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 although it's cold, never leave your vehicle running while you run inside your home or a store—even if for only a minute or two.



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## If a Stranger Comes to the Door

- Criminals sometimes pose as couriers delivering gifts, so be cautious when accepting a package.
- 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's 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 the alley 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 alley or if you see a burglary in progress, call the University City Police Department on 911. ***Be sure to secure your residence, garages, sheds, etc., deterrence goes a long way for criminal opportunists.***

## 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, DVD Players, stereo equipment, cameras, camcorders, sports equipment, jewelry, silver, computers, home office equipment and power tools are on the list. Remember to check it twice!
- Track deliveries online and confirm delivery has occurred. You can sign up for email notifications to track your packages from initial shipment to its arrival at your home, or the recipient's address if you have the gift delivered directly.
- If you know a family member or neighbor will be home, ask them to pick up the packages as soon as they are delivered. Reward them with fresh baked cookies.
- Switch delivery location to work where it can be received by someone and not left on the porch.
- See if the post office or store the product is being shipped from can hold the package for pick up. The post office will allow your package to remain safe and secure for up to 30 days.

## Celebrate Responsibly

The holiday season is a time of celebration and revelry. Drinking and driving is a danger to everyone on the road. Anyone with a BAC of .08 or higher is in violation of MO law and may go to jail. 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.

## Enjoy the Season!

Last but not least, don't let holiday stress get the best of your holiday spirit. Make time to get together with family, friends, and neighbors. And think about reaching out in the spirit of the season and helping someone who's less fortunate or lonely.

***Season's Greetings from the  
University City Police Department.***

