

Holiday Safety Tips for Consumers



The holidays are a time of joy and good spirit. Families and friends come together and share in good will and fellowship.

Many people will be traveling long distances to see their loved ones. Unfortunately, criminals are well aware of this fact and will use it to their advantage. That is why consumers must take precautions when traveling and shopping over the holiday season.

If you are going out for the evening, turn on several lights. Also, turn on a radio or television. Don't display gifts where they can be seen through the window from the outside. Turn off or unplug the lights on any indoor holiday decorations. Double-check door and window locks when you leave, even if you will only be gone for a few minutes. If you find signs that someone has entered your home while you were away, go to a neighbor's house immediately and call the police.

If you are going out of town, do what you can to make it look as though someone is home. Put

two or more interior lights on automatic timers. Set each one on a different schedule, so that no pattern is obvious to outsiders. Ask a friend to stay at your house for one or two nights while you are away. Also, ask the neighbors to watch your home and to park a car in your driveway from time to time. Have the mail and newspaper delivery stopped, and ask a neighbor to pick up any packages that are delivered to your door.

You should also take basic safety precautions when you go shopping. Stay alert and be aware of what is happening around you. Park in a well-lit place. Be sure to lock the car and close the windows. Lock any packages or shopping bags in the trunk.

Pay by check or credit card when possible, and avoid carrying large amounts of cash with you. If you are shopping with children, make sure they know to go to a store clerk or security guard in the event you become separated. Finally, deter pickpockets and thieves by protecting wallets and purses.

Sometimes, criminals pose as couriers delivering packages or flowers. If a delivery person comes to your door, do not open the door

right away. Ask them to show you proof of identification through a window or peephole. If the person's identification, dress or demeanor make you suspicious, tell them that you will pick up the item at their store or delivery warehouse, or ask to have the package left at a neighbor's house. If there is a charge for delivery and you are reluctant to open the door, get an address where you can send payment and arrange for delivery at a later date.

Some people will try to take advantage of our generosity by asking for contributions to a bogus charity. If someone comes to your door seeking a donation, ask to see identification before opening the door. Also, ask for information about the charity, including how the funds will be spent.

If you are uncertain about making a donation, ask for an address where you can send money at a later date. Legitimate charities will not hesitate to give you this information. If you suspect the solicitation is a fraud, decline to make a contribution and report the incident to your local law enforcement agency and the Attorney General's Office.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

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Safe Shopping

- Avoid carrying large bulky packages that block your vision or may cause you to fall
- Keep money or credit cards separate from wallets or purses
- Keep purse or wallet closed and close to your body at all times

Holiday Traveling

- Carry a winter survival kit, including warm gear, nonperishable foods, and first-aid items
- Plan your trip to include rest stops
- Get plenty of rest before driving

Sign up for consumer alerts and other important notifications in the E-mail Subscriptions Section of our Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us

To verify that a charity is registered with the State:

Corporations Section
Secretary of State
Post Office Box 13697
Austin, TX 78711-3697
(512) 463-5555
www.sos.state.tx.us



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Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.