

December Safety Corner

The holiday season is once again upon us and as get ready for some time off for family gatherings, shopping till we drop, and we can easily get distracted and become forgetful about our own personal safety and vulnerability to theft and other holiday crime.

The Safety Committee would like to share some important information with you and ask that you share it with family, friends, and neighbors. The information will also benefit all residents of our community especially during this upcoming winter season. So here are some tips and information that will be of value to you and your family:

Home guidelines:

Keep your windows and doors locked at all times. Keep your outside porch lights on and your home well lit (front and back). Do not display your valuables through the windows and doors of your home and do not display gifts beneath the Christmas tree that can be seen from windows or doors. Keep an eye out for any package deliveries and if you are not there during the day, have a trusted neighbor or close family member retrieve those packages for you and safeguard them until you arrive home. After the holidays, don't advertise gifts received by the boxes left for garbage collection, destroy those boxes and place in sealed, non-clear garbage bags or in your recycling containers

Home Alarm Systems Guidelines:

Make sure your home alarm system is working and run a test with your monitoring company. Note: Prince William County Ordinance on home alarm systems state that every user is required to register their alarms with the police department at a fee of \$10.00, renewable every two years. This ordinance which was adopted by the Prince William County Board of Supervisors in October of 2007, was placed in effect to reduce the number of false alarms and that a fee would be charged for false alarms in excess of two responses in a period of 12 months. Information on this issue can be found in a brochure provided on Prince William County police department False Alarm Reduction Unit and is also on the website at **www.pwcgov.org/police** under general information.

Holiday Travel Guidelines:

Here are some "Guidelines" you can follow to protect your home while you're out of town. The idea is to give the impression that you have never left.

Use timers and program them for different times throughout the house. Cancel your newspaper...for those receiving the Washington Post go to <http://www.washingtonpost.com> click on "subscribe" and you can set up a Vacation Stop, or just have a trusted neighbor or friend pick up your papers. Place your mail on hold by going to <http://www.usps.com>. Look for "HOLD MAIL," fill out the form and you're done.

Have one of your neighbors park in your driveway or in front of your townhome while you're away, and don't announce to the world that you will be out of town; you never know who is

listening or watching on social media. Lock all your windows and doors, including the door inside the garage, set your alarm system and let the company know where you can be reached.

Have your home look “lived in” while you’re away. Use “timers” in different places of your homes and set them to different times. Leave a radio or television on, giving the appearance the home is occupied or place those items on a timer.

Also note that most neighborhoods in the community of Montclair have a neighborhood watch, so they can also keep an eye out for your place.

Strangers at Your Door?

Be aware that criminals sometimes pose as couriers delivering gifts.

It is not uncommon for criminals to take advantage of the generosity of people during the holiday season by soliciting donations door-to-door for charitable causes although no charity is involved. Make sure they are legitimate and ask if they have a solicitor’s permit from the MPOA. Ask for their identification, and find out how the donated funds will be used. If you are not satisfied, do not donate. Donate to a recognized charitable organization.

Hosting a Party?

Have non-alcoholic beverages available for party guests. Find alternative transportation for intoxicated guests. Arrange for an official designated driver for your party who will not drink at all. For those in townhome communities where parking is limited encourage people to car pool and have them park in visitor spaces only.

Old Man Winter.

Be Prepared for Winter Storms with a good Storm Plan. Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit Containing the following items:

- Battery-powered NOAA Weather radio, flashlight, and extra batteries.
- First aid kit and essential medications.
- Bottled water (at least one gallon of water per person per day to last at least 3 days).
- Extra blankets.
- Ensure that each member of your household has a warm coat, gloves or mittens, hat, and water-resistant boots.
- Canned food and can opener.
- Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit for your car, too.
- Have your car winterized before winter storm season and make sure you have a full tank of gas, it keeps the fuel line from freezing.

Have a “Safe,” Happy and enjoyable Holiday season!