

Protect your holiday cheer!

From the brightly lit decorations on our streets to the scent of holiday baking in our homes, Christmas brings both joy and excitement. It can also, however, bring an increased risk of crime. Take a few extra minutes this season to be alert, and help police stop criminals from getting an undeserved Christmas bonus! The Calgary Police Service offers these easy tips to help protect yourself and your property:

Holidays and children

Talking with your child about stranger danger is an excellent way to help protect your child if he or she gets lost in a mall while shopping. Teach your children to ask store clerks or mall security for help if they become separated from you, rather than trying to find you or your vehicle. Children should never stay in the car alone. If you want to keep their presents a surprise, it's best to leave the children at home with proper supervision or arrange a supervised activity for them.

Safe shopping

Be extra careful with purses and wallets. Carry a purse close to your body, not dangling by the straps, and keep wallets in an inside pocket (never in your back pocket). Deter pickpockets and purse-snatchers by not overburdening yourself with packages. If you take some parcels out to your vehicle, put them in the trunk or out of sight and then move your vehicle. If you leave it in the same place, criminals watching the parking lot will know that something of value may now be in your car.

Stay alert

Always park in well-lit areas. When you return to your vehicle after shopping or parties, have your keys ready. As you approach your car, be aware of your surroundings – look around and into your vehicle before entering it. Lock your doors as soon as you get into your vehicle.

Protecting presents

Once you have your gifts back home, protect them by not displaying them to passers-by. Close your curtains at night so that people can't see inside your home, and take cardboard boxes to recycling drop-off points. Leaving them out for garbage pick-up lets criminals know what's inside the house. This is also an ideal time to update or create a home inventory. Take photos or make videos of items and list their descriptions and serial numbers. If your home is burglarized, these records will make it easier for the police to identify and return your property to you.

Donate wisely

Criminals may try to take advantage of your generosity during the holidays by going door-to-door, asking for donations. Always ask for proper identification, find out how the funds will be used and phone the charity to check if they're canvassing in your area. If you encounter someone suspicious in your neighbourhood, call police at 266-1234 to report them.

Staying safe at home

Vacation-proof your home

An empty home can be an easy target for thieves. The Calgary Police Service suggests the following quick and easy tips to protect your home and valuables when you leave your home for an extended period of time:

- **Make your home look lived in:** Put lights, radios and TVs on variable timers. Have someone stay inside your home for a while each day if possible. If you're leaving a vehicle outside your house, have someone move its position periodically, to make it appear as if it is being used. Also arrange for lawn, garden and sidewalk upkeep.
- **Cancel deliveries:** Either cancel newspapers, mail and other delivery items or have a trusted neighbour collect them for you while you are away.
- **Look at your home through a burglar's eyes:** Ensure the exterior of your home is well-lit and that burglars don't have an opportunity to work unseen in hidden areas, such as behind fences or bushes.
- **Check the fine print:** Read your home insurance policy to find out how often your home needs to be checked in order to maintain your coverage, especially during the winter heating season. In some cases, the requirement may be for daily checks.
- **Trust carefully:** Tell only people you trust that you will be away and how long you will be gone for. Leave an itinerary with them so that they can reach you in case of an emergency. Ask trusted neighbours to collect junk mail and look out for your place; if there's no one nearby, hire a reliable house-sitting service.
- **Go off site:** Store important or irreplaceable documents and items away from your home, such as in a safety deposit box.
- **Secure your garage:** Disconnect the garage door opener by switching on its "lock" setting or switching off the circuit breaker that allows the automatic door to open. Place a padlock in the door track to block the roller. Lock all person-doors, including the one between an attached garage and the house.
- **Before you go:** Lock up tools, BBQs and ladders and make sure they are out of sight; set and test your timers; lock and check doors and windows; and leave shades and blinds in normal positions. Turn off the telephone ringer so no one knows your home is empty (and don't leave outgoing phone or email messages saying you are away).

If you return to find that your home has been broken into, don't enter it and don't touch anything. Call police at 403-266-1234 from a neighbour's home or cell phone, and wait for help to arrive.