

Tips for not becoming a victim at holidays

Not everyone considers the holidays a time to celebrate, but rather an opportunity to commit crimes, according to the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department. Busy parking lots and hurried shoppers are just two factors working in favor of criminals.

Here are tips to reduce the risk of becoming a victim:

- Do not leave wrapped presents or new purchases clearly visible in your parked car while shopping. Avoid doing all your shopping at once.
- If possible, do your shopping during the day and avoid peak shopping times.
- Only carry a small purse or wallet, instead of a large bag.
- After opening your presents, do not pile up empty gift boxes from your new computer, DVD, TV etc., on the street for trash pick up. Break boxes down or cut them up to conceal the items.
- Drop off mail at your closest post office if you are mailing money, checks, or gift cards. Pick up your mail promptly and report any suspicious activity immediately to the Sheriff Office or your local Police Department.
- Suspend your mail and paper delivery or have a neighbor pick up these items and ask them to watch your house while you are gone. If you live in the county, contact the El Dorado County Sheriff's STARS at 530.621.7545 to schedule vacation house checks any time of the year. If you live within the city of Placerville, contact Placerville Police SHIELD at 530.642.5210.
- Lock your doors and windows when you leave your house.
- Be prepared for winter weather at home and while driving.

Online safety tips:

- Never use your credit card online on a website that doesn't have an SSL (secure sockets layer) encryption.
- No one needs your Social Security number or birth date for a transaction.
- Check your online bank statements regularly – don't wait until the end of the month. If you see something suspicious, contact your bank immediately.
- Never give anyone your credit card information via email and ensure your computer is up-to-date with current firewalls, updates and anti-virus software.
- Trust your instincts. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.