



Fayette County Sheriff's Office

Wayne Hannah, Sheriff **November 22, 2010**

Press Information

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It's holiday shopping time. Sheriff Wayne Hannah encourages citizens to be safe while shopping.

During the holiday season, busy people intent on trying to complete their Christmas shopping may fall prey to unscrupulous criminals who lurk in mall and shopping center parking lots, doing their "shopping" from the packages placed in parked vehicles. Some foresight and planning can reduce the chances of becoming a victim during a season that should be a joyous and loving celebration.

Safety begins in the parking lot. Once in your chosen space, look around before leaving your car. Is there anyone in the vicinity watching you? Do you see anyone loitering? If so, remain in your car and watch them for a moment. If they move on, that's fine, but if not, you might consider moving to a new parking space. If you feel uncertain or unsafe about a situation you observe, take steps to move yourself to a safer location. Don't assume you are being foolish or paranoid. When shopping at night, look for well-lit parking spaces.

Once you are in a safer location, lock your vehicle and move quickly and confidently to the store. Would-be thieves and robbers are looking for the easiest targets. If you show that you are aware of what is happening around you and move with a sense of purpose, you are less likely to become a victim. Walk against the flow and traffic.

Keep your head up and scanning—look forward, to the right and left, and even check behind as you walk. Awareness is your greatest defense. Don't search through a purse or bags in the parking lot. If you must look for something, make sure you are in the safety of the store before you become absorbed in your hunt for a tissue, shopping list, or other item.

Purses should be carried close to your body and not dangling by the straps. Consider placing wallets in an inside coat pocket or front pants pocket. Don't carry credit cards you don't need or large amounts of cash.

If you store items in your vehicle, make sure they are covered or concealed. If you are putting bags in your vehicle and returning to shop, move your car from time to time in case someone is watching you. Don't leave valuables in view inside your car. If valuables or interesting packages are out of sight, a thief will be less tempted to break in to steal them.

Finally, if leaving late from a shopping mall or store, don't hesitate to ask a store employee for help. Don't accept the kind offer of the "stranger" who meets you outside the door and offers assistance. It may be a kind and generous offer, but it could also be a ploy to gain access to your belongings. When returning to your car, check the front seat, the back seat, and the floor area before entering.

Be aware, stay safe, and have a joyous and wonderful holiday season!