

LIVONIA POLICE
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Senior Safety Tips

Safety In Your Home

For the majority of people, a feeling of security is found in the safety of their homes.

Today, you hear of people (mostly strangers, but on a rare occasion friends) whose homes have been broken into and burglarized. You wonder if this could happen to you or whether it could be prevented. If your home is an easy target for a burglar, your chances of being burglarized increase. There are a number of precautions you can take that will reduce or even eliminate the opportunities that a burglar is looking for.

First, remember that while you are at home there two ways in which you can be contacted: your door and your telephone.

At the Door

Most of the time, the person at your door will be there for a legitimate reason, whether he / she is a friend or stranger.

If the caller is a recognized friend, there should be no problem. If the caller is a stranger, you should immediately become alert. Never open your door to a stranger. You should have a one-way peephole installed in the door that allows you to see who the caller is. The one-way peephole is inexpensive and easily installed.

If a stranger is legitimately at your door, he/she will not object to your being cautious. Establish the caller's identity and the reason for the visit. If he/she refuses to show identification and will not leave, quietly go to the telephone and call the police. If you live in an apartment complex, telephone your building superintendent. Should the caller produce identification but you are still not sure of the validity of the visit, telephone the caller's business office for confirmation. If you still feel uncomfortable, do not open your door; ask the caller to return in 30 minutes or an hour. This will allow you sufficient time to contact a friend or relative to be present when the caller returns. Being cautious increases your safety and well being.

There are a number of ways you can secure your doors. If you do not feel your locks are adequate, we recommend that you contact a professional locksmith or a friend to assist you.

On the Telephone

You control conversations and information flow on your telephone. If you do not know the caller, do not volunteer information. Should the caller ask "Who is this?" you should respond " Who are you calling?" or "To whom do you wish to speak?" Make the caller identify who he/she is calling. If you do not receive an appropriate response, hang up.

Do not allow yourself to be drawn into conversations with strange callers, census/survey takers or business promotion sales persons where you will be asked to reveal your name, address, marital status, personal history information etc. Never give out personal information over the telephone. If the call is legitimate and representative actually requires the information arrange a meeting to your convenience. The legitimate caller will respect your position and agree to an alternative approach. If in doubt, ask the caller for the name of the business and the telephone number so that you can return the call. Then check the number to ensure that it corresponds to the caller's information.

In the case of obscene telephone calls, night calls from strangers or frequent wrong numbers, call the telephone

company and seek their advice. If necessary, change your telephone number.

Safety on the Street

Some seniors are concerned about their safety on the street. Do not have an exaggerated fear of crime; however, recognize that it can happen to you. You must ask yourself: "Just how real is this threat? Is it safe to walk in my neighborhood during the day or night? Have there been street crimes, purse snatchings, robberies or assaults?" If street crimes are a problem in your neighborhood and you have a fear of being victimized, find out what you can do that will eliminate or reduce your risk.

The majority of street crimes are crimes of opportunity. The thief is looking for an easy target: a woman walking down a quiet street, a man who has just cashed his pension check and has been observed with a substantial amount of money. Or, the thief decides that this is the right place and the right time, and you just happen to be there. The thief is very likely to be a teenager, a male and a stranger to you.

The most common street crime is purse snatching. The thief approaches you from behind or face on, catches you unawares, grabs your purse and runs. It happens so quickly that you do not have a chance to see who the thief is.

There have also been reports of men having their wallets taken from them by force. These offenses do not occur that often, but they do occur.

For many people who have been victimized by this hit and run tactic, the trauma changes their outlook toward their community. They become fearful of the street and feel that their security and the quality of their lives have been jeopardized. For many, the instinctive reaction is to withdraw from what once was a friendly world.

You may ask yourself: "How can I prevent myself from becoming a victim?" You can help prevent your purse or wallet from being stolen. You must recognize that you are not safe from crime by virtue of your age. There is no foolproof method that will stop a crime from occurring. There are ways in which you can reduce the risks and increase your sense of personal security. Your common sense is the best guide to your personal protection. Here are a number of rules and guidelines. It is up to you to determine how these rules and guidelines apply to your situation.

Never:

- Carry large sums of money or
- Flash your money for all to see, or
- Carry valuables in full view on your person.

Guidelines:

Women:

Is it always necessary to carry your purse? If you are going to the store for groceries, take along only the amount of money you feel that you will need. Be alert when you are carrying a purse on the street or in a store. Use a shoulder strap model and keep it tucked between your body and your arm. Do not dangle a purse by the straps or hold a clutch-style purse just in the hand. If your purse is a clasp type, carry the purse so that it opens toward your body. If you look as though you are protecting your purse, you will not be considered an "easy" target. DO NOT wrap purse straps around your wrist or you could be dragged along, or knocked to the ground in the event of a "snatch". Should your purse be snatched, try to remember the most significant physical characteristic about the offender:

- a facial scar
- physical deformity, or
- a distinctive facial characteristic.

This descriptive information is more than the color of a jacket that can easily be discarded. Call the police immediately or ask someone to call for you.

Your best defense is practicing crime prevention techniques. Learn what you can do to protect yourself. It may mean going shopping in pairs or in a group, or changing your route to avoid a certain street corner or youth hangout. And there is nothing to stop you from reporting problem areas to the proper authorities. Do not be embarrassed to call

the police. It is our job to assist you and investigate problem areas.

Safety in your Vehicle

Here are some common sense rules that motorists should follow under certain conditions. You must rely on your judgment and assessment of the situation to tell you what you should do.

Remember to keep your vehicle locked at all times, whether moving or parked. If you are driving at night, use well-lit streets and parking lots that are open to easy observation. Be cautious of any stranger approaching your vehicle. If you feel that you are in danger, press the horn repeatedly in short blasts; this will attract attention. If you think you are being followed, pull into the nearest gas station or safe place. Do not drive home. You will only be advertising to your follower where you live.

It is advisable to plan and study your route before you leave, whether it is for a short drive in the city or a longer trip into the country. Do not pick up hitch-hikers. This may seem overcautious and an unfair stereotyping of hitchhikers, however, you do not know who you are giving a ride to. You could be needlessly jeopardizing your safety and well-being.

Should your vehicle break down in an isolated area there are certain steps you should follow, particularly at night:

- Pull your vehicle off the road so you will be out of the traffic
- Turn on the emergency (4 way) flashers
- Raise the hood of the vehicle if you can
- If you have a bright colored cloth (scarf, handkerchief etc) tie it to your radio aerial.
- Then stay in your car with all doors locked and windows rolled up.
- Wait for help to come to you - a patrolling police car, or another motorist.

Should a passing motorist stop, stay in your car and ask him/her to send help back to you. (You must use your judgment in the situation. If the motorist has his/her family in their car and offers you a ride to the nearest garage or town, only you can decide what is best for you under the circumstances.) Remember, a helpful or concerned motorist will be very happy to assist by contacting the right party to help you.

Defending Yourself

Self-defense for seniors is rooted in the common-sense approach. Physical self-defense is not practical for most older people and weapons should not be considered by anyone. If you are at home and some person persists in trying to gain entry, have a loud whistle handy. Start blowing and head for your phone to call the police. Do not hesitate! No criminal wants to attract unnecessary attention and only a very foolish criminal will hang around to answer questions. Carry the whistle on the street; it may save you from becoming a victim. The whistle does not guarantee blanket protection, but it can frighten off a potential thief.

Reminder:

PREVENT CRIME THROUGH EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Research indicates that the opportunist commits most crimes against seniors. Education and awareness of some preventive techniques can help you recognize a potential crime situation and allow positive action to be taken that will reduce or remove the risk.

Research also indicates that for many seniors one of the biggest concerns is the fear of victimization. But it is difficult to prevent something from happening if you do not know what it is you are attempting to prevent. Therefore, while it is not possible in the space available to discuss all the crime problems that concern our society, this booklet deals with crimes that are most likely to affect YOU.

There is evidence that some people who have been victimized are too embarrassed to report the incident to the authorities. For your own well-being and to help prevent others being victims, if you have been victimized (or THINK you have been) **REPORT THE CIRCUMSTANCES TO THE POLICE DEPARTMENT**