

Festive season increases crime, be alert with these tips

As the festive season gets into full swing with the coming long weekend, the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa offers consumers general safety and security tips to add to a safe and secure holiday celebration.

Secure your belongings

- Whilst shopping, do not leave your bag or valuables (eg cellphones) unattended in the trolley
- When trying on clothes, make sure your belongings are secure
- Do not leave valuables such as cellphone or laptops in plain view in your motor vehicle when the vehicle is unattended and/or while driving
- Ensure that you have control over your bag and valuables at all times and, when paying for goods or processing money at a bank, make sure that you do not place your bag on a counter and leave it unattended. Be aware of strangers who may try to distract you.

Be alert when drawing money

When drawing money from ATMs:

- Scan the area for suspicious activity / people before approaching the ATM.
- Remain aware of your surroundings and do not allow anyone to distract you while doing your transactions.
- Use ATMs that you are familiar with and that are situated in well-lit areas, where you are visible and safe.
- Have your card ready in your hand before you approach the ATM to avoid opening your handbag/purse/wallet while waiting in the queue.
- Be cautious of strangers trying to help you as they could be trying to distract you to get your card or pin details. Never accept help from anyone at the ATM.
- Don't force your card into the slot as it might have been tampered with. Never use an ATM that is tampered with or visible damage, this may be a ploy to force you to use another ATM close by, where a device may be mounted.
- Report any foreign objects on ATMs or suspicious people loitering around ATMs to your bank immediately.

Avoid falling victim to card skimming

- Never let your card out of sight when making payments. Always follow your card with your eyes.
- Report any suspicious behavior by persons to whom you have handed your card when making payments immediately to your bank.
- Know what your ATM looks like, so that you are able to notice any foreign objects attached to it.
- It is recommended to register for SMS updates at your bank.
- Shield the keypad when entering your PIN.

When drawing large amounts of money from the bank

- Make sure you have made security arrangements.
- Be aware of suspicious people/vehicles while en-route from and to the bank. Be aware of suspicious persons in the banking queue that break out of the queue and keep falling in at the rear.
- Do not advertise that you are going to the bank. Vary your routine in terms of routes and banking days.

Protect your information

- Protect your ATM Pin number.

- Do not use guessable pin numbers such as your birth date and change it often.
- Memorise your Pin number and never write it down or share it with anyone.
- Don't let anyone stand too close to you in order to keep both your pin and card safe.
- Shield the keypad when entering your Pin to ensure that no one can see it.
- Your Pin number is your personal key to secure banking and it is crucial to keep it that way.

Credit card fraud will increase

- Sign your card as soon as you receive it.
- Never let your card out of your sight when paying for goods or services.
- Ensure that you get your own card back after every purchase.
- Review your account statements as soon as you receive them.
- Report lost or stolen cards immediately.

Report suspicious behaviour

- By reporting suspicious activity you can lower the risk of incidents.
- If you observe suspicious activity/persons, report it to the shopping centre security or SAPS immediately.

Be alert when you leave a shopping centre

- Common sense is always the best defence.
- Have car keys ready before you get to your car. When you return to your car, be aware of your surroundings.
- Let your family and friends know of your shopping plans and when you will be coming home.
- Beware of strangers approaching you for any reason. Any time of the year, con artists may try various methods to distract you.
- Keep all shopping parcels and other valuables out of sight.
- Be aware of occupied vehicles parked near your home - the occupants might be staking out the area.
- Don't approach your empty vehicle if a suspicious-looking person is hanging around in the vicinity.
- When leaving a shopping centre or any other public place be alert and check to see you are not being followed.
- If you suspect you are being followed do not drive directly home but drive to the nearest police station.

Safety tips to prevent house breakings and house robberies

- Lock all doors and close windows when leaving your home unattended (even if you leave for only a short while).
- Do not hide keys under the door mat, in flower pots or any other place where the keys could be found by criminals.
- Ensure your windows have burglar guards to prevent access.
- Do not leave notes outside your house announcing your absence from the house.
- Leave a radio on and a light on at night to give an "at home" appearance. Don't leave an outside lamp burning through the day as this is a clear sign that no one is home.
- Cancel all deliveries (such as newspapers) while you are away. If this is not possible, ask a trusted neighbour to collect these deliveries.
- Change the locks on your house if your keys have been stolen or lost.
- Ask a trusted neighbour to keep an eye on your house while you are away. You should supply this neighbour with a number they can contact you on while you are away.
- When you are at home never listen to music, watch TV or entertain visitors with the doors to your house open or unlocked.
- Never leave the key in the inside of an outer door that has a glass panel or window near the door.
- Don't keep large amounts of cash at your house.
- Ensure your house street number is clearly marked on your fence, wall or gate so that it can be easily seen by any emergency service or police personnel.
- Store emergency contact numbers in your phone and label them clearly to allow fast dialling in an emergency.

- Never give the impression you are at home alone if a stranger telephones you or comes to your door.
- It is your right to see the identification cards of a caller who claims to be from government, municipal officials or even SAPS members. Even if they are in uniform, ask to see their identity documents/cards and insist on this. If they fail to comply ask them to leave your premises immediately and report the matter to the SAPS.
- Get to know your neighbours.
- If you come home and find a door or window open or signs of forced entry, don't go into the house. Go to the nearest phone and call the police.

Remember to call 10111 in case of an emergency.

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