

## CRIME WATCH—SUMMER QUARTER

Summertime approaches and in Texas that means hot (that is, oppressive) weather. The children will be out of school and perhaps they'll be involved in some fun summer activities. Family vacations offer a chance to build some experiences of a lifetime as well as travel to some different parts of this planet. Maybe it's time to read that good book you've been putting off. By the way, you might enjoy my wife, Naomi's crime/suspense series that involves a young Texas woman in London: *The Witness* is the first novel and *The Mission* is the sequel. Readers have been raving about the books and their unforgettable characters. You can learn more at [www.NaomiKryske.com](http://www.NaomiKryske.com).

The National Crime Prevention Council tells us: The school year is almost over, which means that summer vacation is just a few weeks away. For teens, summertime is often split between time home alone, at a job, out with friends, or traveling. It's important for teens to know that even though their summer schedules may allow for more freedom than their academic schedules, they still need to follow rules and understand that negative choices will continue to bring negative consequences. Share these tips with teens to help them stay safe during their summertime ventures.

### Staying safe when home alone

- Remember not to do anything while home alone that you aren't allowed to do when your parents are there.
- If you use the Internet, remember to engage in friendly and legal behavior. Be sure not to cyberbully or download pirated music/videos/software. Do not give any personal information (such as your address or phone number) to anyone you meet online. Never let people you meet online know that you are home alone.
- Don't let anyone in your home without a parent's permission. If something goes wrong while you're home alone, call a trusted adult or law enforcement officer to help you.

### Staying safe at work

- Be sure not to work alone, especially after hours. Create a buddy system for walking to parking lots or public transportation.
- Keep your purse, wallet, keys, or other valuables with you at all times or locked in a closet, drawer, or locker. Mark other personal items with your name or initials.
- Know the exit routes and evacuation plans for your building.

### Staying safe with friends

- Using alcohol or drugs is illegal and dangerous no matter where you are or who you are with. Using tobacco is dangerous, too. Don't allow yourself to give in to peer pressure or make poor choices.
- Pay attention to the road when driving with friends. Car accidents are one of the leading causes of death for teens.
- Before you leave your house, tell your parent or caregiver where you are going, who you are going to be with, and when you'll return.

### **Staying safe when traveling**

- Carry traveler's checks instead of cash, and record information (serial numbers and item name) of any valuables you take on your vacation (such as cameras or mp3 players). Take a copy of the information with you, and leave one with a family member or trusted adult.
- Learn about your vacation destination before you arrive; know what sites you want to visit and how to get there using a safe, well-traveled route.
- Be sure to lock your room at your lodging place, and insist that everyone carry his or her key when outside the room. Remember not to give out your room number or invite strangers into your room.

### **Crime Prevention Tips for Homeowners**

The Baltimore County Police Department offers some good tips that also apply to us in Plano to help us protect our property and valuables with some commonsense measures.

### **Beware of Deception Burglaries and Home Improvement Scams**

#### **Elderly Especially Warned to be Alert**

Citizens are alerted to certain crime trends that have occurred throughout the county in recent years. Deception burglaries and home improvement scams occur throughout the year, but are known to increase when the weather gets warmer. Typically these are criminals who are on the move. They begin working in the southern states and head north during the spring and summer months.

The elderly are the most likely targets since they tend to be trusting and very concerned about their property and their neighborhood. Adult relatives of senior citizens should remind them of this possible crime.

#### **Deception Burglaries**

Be mindful of certain ruses:

- Suspects generally work in pairs and approach homeowners at their residence with the intent of gaining entry under a seemingly benevolent

- role like posing as a legitimate worker from a local gas company, water department, cable company, or as a tree trimmer, paver, county inspector, or government official. One suspect will distract the homeowner while a second suspect will quietly enter the home and search for valuables and cash.
- A suspect may also pose as a family friend of a relative or friend of a neighbor. He or she will knock on the door and ask for a pen and paper to leave the victim's neighbor a note. The suspect may appear to have difficulty writing the note, and will ask to come inside the house. Once inside the victim's house, the suspect will ask the victim to help write the note. While that criminal distracts the victim, others enter the residence to remove money and valuables.

A variety of vehicles have been associated with these subjects including pickup trucks, vans, and sport utility vehicles. Often, the victim doesn't even know he or she has been victimized for hours or days later when they might go looking for a piece of jewelry or precious heirloom.

Be alert to anyone in your neighborhood asking to gain entry into your home. Always ask to see identification and let them know you are going to call and get authorization from their company before allowing them access. If they are legitimate, they won't mind the wait.

Investigators believe many deception burglaries don't get reported because the victim is too embarrassed or fears retribution. Neglecting to call may allow a criminal to go free and victimize someone else.

Remember, do not intervene, but call 911 immediately with a description of the suspect and vehicle used in the suspicious activity.

## **Home Improvement Scams**

Bunco or scam artists drive through neighborhoods looking for people in their yards. Home improvement scams often involve someone posing as a repair person who offers a bargain price on a home repair. The National Association of Bunco Investigators (NABI) says to beware when a repair person knocks on your door. Look for these telltale signs:

- The repair person drives an unmarked truck or van with an out-of-state license.
- Only rarely will legitimate home improvement companies solicit door-to-door. They usually distribute fliers or make phone calls since it's more cost effective for them.
- The worker has no business identification, local address or telephone number. Request identification so that you can call the company for verification.

- You are offered a “special price” if you sign that day. Contractors don’t pressure customers to sign a contract or job order immediately.
- Beware of excuses such as “We just finished a job around the corner and had extra materials that we could offer you at a discounted price.” Professional companies do not operate in that manner.
- The worker asks for upfront costs or fees, or accepts only cash. Reputable contractors do not ask for all the money up front. A customer pays one third of the bill first, then another third midway through the job, and the rest when the work is completed.
- Never pay in cash. Using a check keeps a record of the transaction and often provides identification of the person cashing the check.
- No written estimates or contracts are offered. If you have no contract, you have no recourse if the job is faulty or is never completed.
- The worker has no references. Ask for references and check around the neighborhood to see if anyone has contracted with this person to do work on their home.

These scam artists also like to intimidate their prey. After a job is finished, usually with inferior materials and shoddy work, the customer is informed that they owe more money. When the customer objects, he or she is told that the materials used were stolen and the police will be brought in if the higher price isn’t paid.

Beyond the intimidation, the materials and workmanship used in a bunco scam are usually of poor quality. The roof coating, according to NABI, might be whitewash, the coating on the drive could be motor oil, and the fertilizer may consist of sawdust and oil.

Compare estimates with other licensed contractors when you decide to have work done on your home. Don’t give your hard-earned money to some “fly by night” contractor.

If you suspect that the person at your door is a scam artist, contact the Plano Police Department at 911.

### **Lock All Doors and Windows**

The Baltimore County Police Department reports that burglaries in the County are oftentimes committed through unlocked doors or windows. Stop these thefts. The best deterrent to keep thieves from stealing your property is a lock and key.

Don’t assume you are safe just because you are at home. It’s nice to open the windows and let the fresh air into our homes, but remember these tips to avoid a burglary.

- Lock windows on the first floor or ground floor even if there is an enclosed or screened-in porch. It takes so little time and effort to cut through screen mesh and gain access to a home or apartment.
- Secure basement windows and doors. It can be easy to forget about this area of the house when we're running in and out doing chores.
- Place a security bar, often referred to as "Charlie bars," between the patio sliding door and doorjamb. Don't assume that the latch on the door is secure enough to ward off a thief.

### **Working Outside? Stop a Burglar**

Often, burglars watch and wait to see where you are and what you are doing. Lock up while you spruce up!

- Out working in the yard or garden? Make sure all doors and windows – sheds, garages, patio, and house – are closed and locked. This is especially true if you are in the front yard and the storage area is in the back, or vice versa. Carry a key with you to lock and unlock these doors.
- Finished with that yard work? Remember to clean up and lock up behind you. An open door is an invitation to a thief. When you put your tools away, don't forget to lock the doors.

Dial 911 if you see anyone suspicious lurking around your neighborhood. An officer can cruise through the area to check things out. You can even remain anonymous.

### **Burglars Shun Good Locks and Lights**

A burglar placed under arrest told Baltimore County Police that there are two types of specialty locks that he and other thieves avoid: hidden shackle locks and disc brake locks.



Hidden Shackle Lock

### **Hidden Shackle Locks**

These locks are often used on tractor trailer doors, but homeowners and businesses use them on storage sheds and other structures easily accessed from the outside.

The locks are effective because there is no real practical way to cut the lock with bolt cutters. Also, prying them out of the door is time consuming and noisy. The core of the lock is set into the lock. They can be purchased at home improvement and hardware stores for a minimal investment of about \$40.

### **Disc Brake Lock**



Disc Brake Lock

The other, yet effective, locks the thief referred to are used to secure ATVs and dirt bikes.

The lock attaches to a wheel on the bike or All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV). For those who want to spend extra on security, there is a more sophisticated lock that has a built-in motion detector alarm. The locks can be purchased online, at motorcycle shops, and at some home improvement stores. Some stores will even special order a lock. The locks range in price from \$40 to \$90.

### **Lighting**

The thief also said a simple light shining in a shed or other structure keeps people like himself away. Burglars like to work in the dark.

No one can prevent crime, but specialized locks and good lighting are deterrents for would-be thieves.

### **Neighborhood Awareness: The Key To Crime Prevention**

A good neighbor can be one of the best crime prevention tools. This is particularly true when various criminals and con artists use the warm weather to take advantage of residents, particularly the elderly. Watchful eyes in the

neighborhood can spot criminals and alert police and the community to their presence.

Keep a check on your neighbors. If, for example, you see an elderly resident in conversation with a stranger, politely inquire about what is going on. If residents see strangers sizing up their neighbor's home, that could also be a sign something is wrong.

A call to 911 will get an officer to the scene to check things out. Involvement such as this builds stronger bonds between neighbors, and helps maintain safe neighborhoods.

### **Cars Unlocked, Windows Open and Convertible Tops Down – An Open Invitation to a Thief**

Warm, sunny days invite drivers to roll down the windows, and for some, drive with the top down on their cars. Unfortunately, that same wonderful weather invites thieves too.

Drivers and passengers are reminded to be cautious when leaving a vehicle open. While it may be inconvenient to put the windows and top up every time the vehicle is parked, it is even more troublesome to find it ransacked.

Leaving your car doors unlocked is another open invitation to thieves.

Cell phones, CDs, GPS units, and other items can be easily stolen from the vehicle when the doors are left unlocked or the top is down. Important papers such as insurance and vehicle registration information often found in the glove compartment are also at risk of being stolen. This paperwork could help a thief gain personal data that might lead to identity theft.

Last but not least, the vehicle can be stolen.

### **Got a Bike, Lawn Mower or Other Equipment? Engrave It, Lock It or Lose It**

Bike riding and warm weather are a natural combination. But if your bike is stolen, hiking will be more your speed. Here are a few suggestions for keeping your bike and other valuables safe and secure.

- Record the make, model and serial numbers of your bike, mower and other equipment. Take pictures of your equipment and keep the information in a safe place.
- Engrave your valuables. Engraving is simple and fast. You can even borrow an engraving tool from your local Baltimore County Police precinct. Officers say using the ID numbers from a driver's license or Maryland ID

card is the best way to mark your personal belongings. Never use a social security number as an ID number.

- When storing your bike in a shed or garage, secure it to another large piece of equipment, like a lawn mower or workbench. Attaching it to a piece of heavy equipment makes it more difficult to just walk or ride away from the area.

For more information on how to safeguard your valuables contact your precinct's Community Outreach Team.

### **Fraud Often Follows Disasters**

If a natural disaster forces you to leave your home or business, have you taken the necessary precautions to protect your identity? Gather identification and important documents before disaster strikes.

If you must leave your home due to weather conditions, you will need certain documents to identify yourself and your family. Police suggest you do the following:

- Make copies of birth certificates, driver's licenses, social security cards, death certificates, bank account numbers, insurance papers and any other bits of information for each member of your family.
- Take those papers and store them in a watertight locked box, or large waterproof plastic bag.
- Don't put the papers in your vehicle until you are in the car and ready to go. Thieves are opportunists and will break into your car to gain access to your valuable papers.

Business owners are advised to protect vital information by scanning and encrypting paperwork as well as other sensitive files to protect customers, employees, and vendors. If that isn't feasible, detach the Central Processing Unit (CPU) and take it with you.

Don't let thieves steal your hard-earned name and reputation. Keep important papers and documents with you.

Finally, let's review the basic year-round crime prevention attitudes:

- **Lock your car when you're not in it (both on the street and in your garage).**
- **Don't leave your automatic garage door opener in your car—take it with you.**
- **Don't leave your garage door open when you're not in the garage.**
- **Lock the door between your garage and your home.**
- **Lock your back gate.**



- **Be situationally aware wherever you are; home, school, supermarket, mall, etc.**
- **Report to the police in a timely manner (as soon as practicable) suspicious people in neighborhood—get full license plate numbers and accurate descriptions of the suspicious persons.**
- **Don't let your house convey the "not home" look—use lights on timers, make arrangements for mail and newspapers, etc.**
- **If a stranger knocks on your front door or rings the doorbell, don't open the door. Instead in a loud, forceful voice say, "Who is it? What do you want." (The stranger will probably make some lame excuse and then walk away. If he/she hears nothing from inside the house, stand by. In 5 to 15 minutes someone will be in your back yard and trying to kick in your back door!)**

Please feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions or suggestions. May we together work to make Kimberlea an even better place to live and raise our families.

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