

## **CRIME WATCH—SPRING QUARTER**

It's hard to believe spring is just around the corner. Trees, plants, flowers, and allergies will soon all bloom again. And, unfortunately, so will tornadoes. Below I have included some spring related safety and security tips to help keep you and your family safe and secure.

### **Spring Related Safety/Security Tips**

- Keep doors locked at all times. If you are working in the back yard, keep your front door and garage door closed and locked; and lock your back door when you are in the front yard. Always lock your doors when you leave, even if you only plan to be gone for a few minutes.
- During the spring weather, many people open windows or sliding glass doors while they are at home.
- Always remember to close and lock your windows and sliding doors when you go to bed or leave the house.
- Install motion-activated lights in your front and back yards, so when someone approaches your home, the lights automatically come on, illuminating that person.
- Put all ladders and other tools back into a secure storage area after you use them. Ladders and other tools can be used by criminals to gain access your home. Always lock any storage unit or shed you have on your property.
- Be aware of home improvement scams. If you did not solicit the contractor or salesman who shows up at your door unannounced, do not do business with that person.
- If a utility representative comes to your house, request identification. True representatives will carry their identification and they will gladly show it to you. Call their company for verification.
- In warm weather months, personal property thefts increase; there is a tendency to leave items, such as bicycles, gardening tools, lawnmowers, weed eaters, and other yard tools lying around in the open.
- Make sure you lock up your personal property in your garage or yard shed; it doesn't take long for someone to ride by and quickly take your property. An open garage door or yard shed can also be inviting, keep them closed even when you're at home.
- Always remember to roll up your car windows, take any valuables out of your car, and lock your doors every time you exit your vehicle, even if your vehicle is parked in your driveway.
- Being a good neighbor can be one of the best crime prevention tools. Watchful, attentive neighbors can identify activity that is not "normal" to their neighborhoods and alert the police

### **Tips for child safety**

- With the growing number of middle and high school kids playing video games online, it's necessary that we're aware of potential dangers. Online games can be played against other people anywhere in the world. We do a good job of teaching our kids to avoid people they don't know on social networking sites; however, many kids play these online games against unknown people. Internet predators are now targeting kids playing these online games. Predators will build relationships with kids by losing on purpose and complimenting the skills of their target. Predators will also pretend to be another kid and ask their target to be a teammate.
- The more "connected" a child is, the more availability for that child to experience or engage in negative online experiences. Cyber bullying can be referred to online harassment that is repetitive and also has an "offline" connection; usually in school. Preventing cyber bullying can be done by educating kids about the consequences of cyber bullying and also by teaching them to respect others and take a stand against bullying of any kind.
- Bullying in schools is not just a problem for its victims; it makes all students feel unsafe. Our children should be taught to respect others, walk away from bullies, and to report it every time they are bullied. It is also a good idea to document every encounter with a bully.
- Always know where your children are at all times and make sure they return home promptly at appointed times. Never leave your children alone in a vehicle, restroom, store, playground, or other public place. Make certain children know their full name, parent's names, address, and telephone number including area code. Talk with children about strangers the potential dangers associated with them.
- More than five thousand people in the US, mostly young people, start using illegal drugs every day. Using illegal drugs stops the development of the person using them until the day they stop. It is important to watch for any significant changes in your child's physical appearance, personality, attitude or behavior; these may be signs of drug use. Please take the time to educate your children about the dangers of drugs

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

Citizens are alerted to certain crime trends that have occurred throughout the county in recent years. Unfortunately, deception burglaries and home improvement scams are known to occur 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**

This is the season when bunco or scam artists drive through neighborhoods looking for people in their yards. Bunco 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.

Bunco 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 police at 911. You could be helping other potential victims from being scammed.

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

Burglaries in Plano 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 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.

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

A good neighbor can be one of the best crime prevention tools. This is particularly true at this time of the year 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.

### **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.

Cell phones, CDs, GPS units, and other items can be easily stolen from the vehicle when 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.

The inside of the vehicle may be hot upon return, but the odds are good that the vehicle will still be there with everything intact.

### **Important Tornado Safety Tips to Follow**



Tornadoes extend from severe thunderstorms and usually develop from the trailing end of a storm. The air may become very still before one hits. It is also not uncommon for the sun to be visible or skies to clear partially during a tornado. Some are easily seen and detected, while others strike quickly with little or no warning.

Some warning signs of a tornado include strong winds with cloud-base rotation, whirling dust and debris, hail and/or heavy rain and a loud rumble or roar that sounds similar to a moving train.

If it is nighttime, look for bright blue- or green-colored flashes near the ground. That is an indication of snapped power lines and an almost sure sign of intense wind or a tornado.

Two of the most fundamental precautions that you can take in the event of a tornado, no matter where you are, is staying low to or below the ground in an interior space away from windows and covering your head with your hands and arms.

It is a good idea for your family to select a place to meet following any tornado in case you are separated at the time of the incident. Phone lines or other modes of communication may be affected by the twister and are not always reliable.

Mobile homes and dwellings without basements or foundations are not a safe place to be in a tornado. If your community does not have a storm shelter, seek a sturdy building nearby. If there is no time, seek a closet or climb into the bathtub and cover yourself some sort of thick padding, such as a mattress or blankets.



If you live in a house with a finished basement, corner rooms or bathrooms and closets offer extra protection. The more concrete walls or plumbing around you, the better. This reduces the risk of your home caving in on you and better protects you from flying debris.

If you are in a high-rise building, such as a skyscraper, apartment building or dormitory, go to the lowest level or the most interior part of the building you can find. Avoid elevators and stay away from windows.

One of the worst places to be during a tornado is in a vehicle. **Tornadoes generally track from southwest to northeast or from west to east.** Drive in a right angle to the storm and get a considerable distance away.

However, occasionally tornadoes can take an unpredictable turn in any direction. If the storm is approaching fast, park your car quickly and seek a sturdy building or ditch. Do not stay near any vehicles, as they can easily be picked up and dropped by the tornado.

### **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. I look forward to meeting each of you as we together work to make Kimberlea an even better place to live and raise our families.

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[www.YourFinestHour.com](http://www.YourFinestHour.com)

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