

# *How To Protect Your Personal Safety*

by Officer Andrew Woods, Moreno Valley Police Department

There are things that you can do to increase your personal safety and, hopefully, avoid becoming a victim. First, you need to know what to do if you witness a crime:

- Stay calm.
- Remember that your personal safety is your number one priority.
- If not involved, don't get involved. Your involvement may escalate a situation.
- Memorize or write down details of what you see regarding suspect and vehicle descriptions.
- Call 911 and report the crime.

**Burglary.** There is no absolute way to completely eliminate the possibility of your house being burglarized. The professional burglar devotes all of his or her time and energy to figure out a way to get into your house and take what rightfully belongs to you. The critical area here is to not make it easy for the thief. We need to put anything and everything we can in the burglars way so that he/she will go somewhere else to commit a crime:

- Overgrown trees and bushes provide concealment for burglars hide. Keep trees trimmed to no lower than 7ft and bushes no higher than 1-2 feet high.
- Be sure your address is clearly visible from the street and preferably back lit so it can be easily seen by patrol officers.
- Lighting is also important. Install porch and yard lighting so that anyone walking through your yard can be seen.
- If you don't have dead bolt locks on all of your doors get them. Properly installed dead bolts are one of the easiest and most effective ways to prevent a burglary.
- Keep all rear yard gate access locked and secured.
- Keep all doors and windows locked and secured even when you are home
- Install an alarm system and invest in the monitoring system. This usually runs \$20-30 a month and is well worth the expense.
- Pets can be helpful. A dog that barks when strangers approach is a definite deterrent.
- Work with your neighbors and Law Enforcement to set up a Neighborhood Watch program. Our Neighborhood Watch slogan says it all, "Eyes and ears, observe and report, with no confrontation." We love nosy neighbors. So know who belongs in your neighborhood and report any suspicious activity before a burglary occurs.
- Be sure to store valuables out of plain sight. If you have a \$5,000.00 home entertainment system, the front room of your residence may not be the best spot for it.
- Never give your keys to repair workers, tradesmen or maids. You should be present while work is being done to your house.
- Be sure to check identification of workers before allowing them into your house.

- Be sure that you know who your kids are bringing in your house. They could be checking your house for a future burglary.
- When you are on vacation –
  - Have a neighbor, pick up mail, newspapers and any advertisements left on your front door.
  - Use timers to rotate interior lights so the same light in the same room doesn't remain on giving the appearance that no one is home.
  - Leave a TV or radio on. These too will need to be turned on and off using timers.
  - Cars should be moved around and not left in the same spot.

The bottom line is to do everything you can to give the appearance that you are not on vacation. Also, make it clear to who ever is looking after your house that in event of an emergency or suspicious circumstance, the police need to be contacted first. It won't do any good to call you in Hawaii to let you know your house is being burglarized. Call the police first; we will make contact with the victim later. Those few moments could make the difference in catching a burglar or having him get away.

How to help prevent a sexual assault. Sexual assaults can happen any where at any time. Our goal is to get you thinking about changing your everyday habits so that you are conducting daily business in the safest way possible. Here are some tips for you on how to prevent a sexual assault:

- Keep entrances to home well lit.
- Secure all doors and windows. Use dead bolts, window locks and install peep holes on your front door.
- Know your neighbors and be aware of strangers.
- Ask for identification from contractors or service people before allowing them in your house.
- If your house is not secure when you arrive home, do not go inside. Call 911.
- Have emergency numbers by your phone.

When walking or in public places:

- Always be aware of your surroundings
- Avoid isolated or dark places
- Walk at a steady pace and look confident
- Wear comfortable clothing so you can move fast
- Carry a whistle or noise maker. The sound may scare off an attacker
- Have car keys ready before you get to your car and check your back seat before entering your vehicle

Reduce the odds of a Robbery happening to you. Robbery becomes important for two reasons - The high probability of injury and or loss of property. The potential for a robbery cannot be completely eliminated, but planning, training and preparation can reduce your risk of injury if you are the victim of a robbery. Follow these safety tips to reduce your chances of personal injury:

- Remain cooperative and calm at all times.
- Remain silent and do as the suspect tells you do.
- Remain polite and composed.

- Announce in advance any sudden movements that you must make.
- Keep your hands where they can be seen.
- Even if you cannot see a weapon, assume the suspect has one and that it is real.
- Do your best to not cost the suspect time. In a robbery situation time is not on the side of the suspect.
- Make mental notes of suspect and vehicle descriptions.
- Immediately call 911 and give clear, articulate information to the dispatcher
- The immediate things that the dispatcher is going to ask are:
  - The suspects' descriptions.
  - A description of their vehicle.
  - Their last known direction of travel.
  - If there were any injuries.
  - Any weapons that were used.
- Never try to overpower a robber, chase a robber or use a weapon yourself

**Safety when we are out shopping.** We all have heard we should keep packages we've already purchased out of sight in our vehicles to help prevent their theft, but there are also some things that we can do to keep ourselves safe while driving to shopping locations:

- Take a friend with you or let someone know where you are going.
- Plan route out in advance.
- Drive with doors locked and windows rolled up.
- Check back seat every time you stop and re-enter vehicle.
- If your car breaks down:
  - Stay inside your locked vehicle with the windows up.
  - Call for help on cell phone if you have one.
  - Do not open door if someone stops to help.
  - Do not stop to help others – call for assistance from a safe location.
  - If you believe someone is following you, drive to the nearest Police Station, Fire Department, or open business.

And here are some other things to do at the shopping center:

- When pulling into parking lot, check for loiterers or any suspicious activity.
- Park in well lit area and move packages out of plain sight.
- Do not take short cuts through vacant parking lots.
- Be alert to surroundings.
- Carry purse under arm in a secure manner.
- Avoid carrying excessive amounts of cash – use check cashing or ATM cards instead.
- Try to avoid ATMs at night unless they are inside a store.

Another very, very important thing to remember is to never leave children or grandchildren unattended or send them into a restroom that you have not checked first. Establish a pre-arranged meeting place with your children in case you get separated.

**Use these tips and incorporate them in your daily activities. Be alert to your surroundings. Pay attention to the dangers that we have pointed out. If you have additional questions feel free to contact your local Law Enforcement agency for assistance.**

The information in this article was originally presented in a video, produced by the Partnership to Preserve Independent Living in 2002. Copies of the video may be obtained through the Partnership's website at <http://www.livingpartnership.org/EducationalVideos.htm> .

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