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THE SALEM CITY CRIME PREVENTION CONNECTION



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An All-Too-Familiar Tragedy

September 2012

Last month, our nation was rocked with two tragic shootings that, again, shook our collective sense of safety and security. The first incident: a mass-shooting in a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado brought the grim reminder that horrific events can happen anywhere and at any time; even at a movie premier that attracted countless young people. The second incident reminded us that places of worship are certainly not off-grounds for those who desire to commit crimes and inflict pain on others, when a lone gunman opened fire at a Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, killing six persons.



Image courtesy of Alamy

The unanswered question of "why" haunts the families of those who were killed or injured, while also creating a question for all of us as to whether there truly is a "safe-place" where we can go to be entertained or attend a worship service. The answers are complicated, and some may never be known, and unfortunately we don't have the ability to predict what may happen in the future.

Without the value of a crystal ball to view the future, we must rely on the principles of personal safety. The first of which is prevention – by identifying persons who may be in crisis and to take steps to ward off these criminal acts, before they occur. We must also focus on our awareness of known and potential threats. Finally, we must be prepared and ready to react to whatever may occur.

Be Aware – Prevent – Prepare

Be prepared by being aware! The chances of a shooting incident occurring are very slim and should not dominate your lifestyle or activities. But being aware of who is around you is always a good preventive step. This goes not only for while you are in public buildings, but also if you are out for a walk or in an unfamiliar area. If you feel uncomfortable because of someone or some action, leave and come back later.

Educate your kids! Explain to them that bad things do happen to good people and that it is important they react appropriately when confronted with dangerous situations. Except in rare cases, putting yourself at risk doesn't help the situation and often complicates or worsens it.

Get out and away...if it's safe to do so! In most incidents, the best advice is to quickly get yourself out of harm's way and leave the immediate area. There have been rare occasions where escape was more dangerous than staying. Think through scenarios with your family. What if I was in an office building and someone began shooting? What would I do if I couldn't escape? Locking oneself in an office and hiding under a desk may be the best and only alternative. A quick 9-1-1 call (even if you are unable to speak and just leave the phone line open) will bring the needed help.

Last, and certainly not least, is REPORTING. If you witness something suspicious and you are concerned, tell someone! If you are at a facility that has security staff, report it to them or give us a call so that we can evaluate the situation.



ATM Safety – Don't let someone finish your withdrawal for you!

It's nearly impossible to imagine life as it once was...no cell phones, no laptops, no iPod's, or how about those days when you actually had to go into a bank to do your banking? ATM's have been a staple of easy banking for more than a couple of decades and they are used by a majority of banking customers. From the ease of deposits, withdrawals, to even paying bills, these machines have changed the way we bank.

This method of banking has also benefited criminals who are always on the prowl for an easy way to score some cash. However, a good crime preventive mindset and strategy on the part of potential victims can foil the thief's attempt at an easy take.

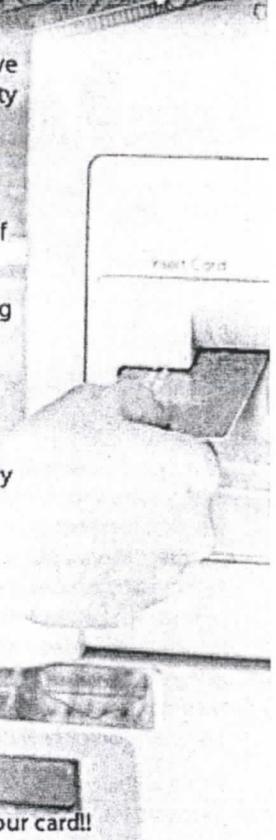
ATM safety begins with AWARENESS, knowing what and who is around you. When approaching the machine keep aware of anyone at or near the machine, as well as anyone suspicious in the parking lot. If it's nighttime consider using an ATM that is inside of a business versus going to an outdoor machine where no one is around.

When leaving your vehicle be sure to turn it off, close and lock the door. An open vehicle, especially one with the engine running, could be an enticement for a person interested not only in cash but a set of wheels!

It can be easy to become engrossed in the transaction, but don't let your guard down. Look around and keep aware. If there's a mirror attached to the machine, it's not for makeup, it's for looking behind you! DON'T SHARE your personal identification number (PIN) by letting wandering eyes look in on what you are doing; block the view of others.

Make it FAST and SMALL! Long transactions and large withdrawals attract thieves looking for opportunities to rob and steal. Keep withdrawals to a reasonable amount and do not spend time visibly counting your cash while at the machine.

Take some time TODAY to step up your ATM safety and prevention mindset to make sure that every dollar you withdraw goes into your pocket and not someone else's. **PS – Don't forget your card!!**



Mail Theft – It's More Than Missing Paper

Mail spilling out of a mailbox or mail slot, anxiously waiting to be opened, can tell a lot about you and your family, some of which you may not want someone to know; especially a complete stranger!

Would you routinely put a sign on your house, "not home?" Certainly not, but that overflowing mail is saying exactly that...you are not home! If you are going to be gone for a day or two, have a trusted neighbor or friend pick up your mail and ask them to collect it as soon as possible after delivery. If you don't have someone to pick up the mail, contact the United States Postal Service (U.S.P.S.) to hold your mail until you return.

Besides telling everyone you aren't home, mail can provide some very enticing financial opportunities for thieves, especially identity thieves! A bill or document with account numbers, social security numbers, your date of birth or more information can allow a would-be thief to potentially access your credit or cause other financial problems by assuming your identity. Don't give thieves the opportunity to steal this information. Remove your mail as soon as possible from your mail box.

One more note on mail – it's a good idea to deliver your outgoing mail to a U.S.P.S. facility, mailbox or directly into the hands of a letter carrier. Leaving bills and other items outside for pickup can be tempting to thieves.

Here are a few tips to keep your mail secure:

- If your mail is deposited into an unsecured location (residential mailbox, basket, place with easy access) then make sure it's collected as soon as possible after delivery. If you get home late or you're going to be gone overnight ask a trusted neighbor to collect the mail for you.
- Leaving mail for pickup is risky because it is the perfect opportunity for thieves looking for a "check in the mail" that they can take, wash (remove portions of the check such as who it is made out to) and attempt to cash the check to themselves.
- When possible, have checks direct deposited into your bank account so that you don't have "paper checks" coming in the mail.

- ✉ Contact your financial institutions and ask them to stop sending you credit offers.
- ✉ If your area allows, setup your mail receptacle so that the mail drops into a locked box, your garage or other location where it is difficult to be retrieved by an unauthorized person.
- ✉ Be prepared for what's coming in the mail. Know the normal dates you receive bills/invoices and also when to expect items being sent to you (such as replacement credit cards) and contact the sender/issuer if they don't arrive when expected.

Home Security 101- Hints That You're Not Home

If someone asked a burglar the most ideal target for their theft, they would probably say a house that is unoccupied and guaranteed to stay that way. The vast majority of burglars are in the crime "business" for the purpose of taking items of value, not to cause physical harm to someone.

A home that is unoccupied can provide them the opportunity and the likelihood of not encountering someone who will defend their property. Some burglars go to great lengths to make sure that no one is home. It may be observing the home for an extended period, knocking on the door, watching for lights to be turned on or looking for other telltale signs such as newspapers piled on the driveway and mail falling out of the mailbox.

The *lived in* look is the best tool for making your residence a turn-off for burglars.



- ▶ **The front yard** – As mentioned, newspapers and mail left behind can be a sure sign that someone isn't home. Likewise, garbage cans left out, cars left collecting dust from not being moved for several days and a dark front porch can all contribute to a burglary invitation. When you're gone for a period of time arrange for a trusted neighbor or friend to pick up your newspapers and mail, park their car in your driveway and put away those garbage cans.
- ▶ **The back yard** – Consider keeping your side gates closed and locked and install motion detection lighting. Be sure to let your trusted neighbors know about the motion detection lighting so they'll know to react if they see it on during unusual periods.
- ▶ **The inside** – Place lights and a stereo, or even a television, on timers that mimic your normal schedule (it could be obvious to a burglar that lights are on a timer if they come on and go off at extremely unusual hours). Keep window coverings closed to prevent someone from looking in and easily seeing that no one is home.
- ▶ **The "free" protection system** – You may have one of the very best home protection systems around and not even realize it, and the best part is that it's free!
- ▶ Trusted neighbors can be an important part of your home protection strategy, especially those that are home during the day or other periods when you are not present, including when you are gone overnight. Neighbors can be the eyes of protection if they know what to look for.
- ▶ If you have a neighbor that you feel you can put trust in, talk with them about keeping an eye on your home when you are away. Let them know generally when to expect you or other authorized persons at your home.
- ▶ Most importantly, provide your neighbor with telephone numbers that you can be reached at, and it's always a great idea to provide at least one backup number to another responsible family member or friend in the event they can't reach you and there is an emergency at your home.
- ▶ Talk with your neighbor about your expectations of what action you would like them to take in the event of a suspicious happening occurring at your home. If you have provided your very trusted neighbor with a key to your home be sure to remind them not to label the key in the event someone were to break into their home and find the key to YOUR home.
- ▶ Don't forget the most important step in security: lock those doors and windows!