

Staying Safe and Secure Over the Holidays

Howard County police to increase presence during the holidays; additional patrols for shopping centers, neighborhoods and roadways

Howard County police will be increasing their presence in shopping areas, neighborhoods, and on roadways to ensure residents stay safe this holiday season. Additional patrols, with both uniformed and plainclothes officers, will be in effect from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day.

The increased police presence aims to deter robberies, shoplifting, theft and associated crimes at malls and shopping centers, as well as package thefts from residences.

Beginning this weekend, police will have additional patrol cars on the roads looking for impaired drivers. "We want people to celebrate safely over the Thanksgiving weekend and throughout the holiday season," said Police Chief Gary L. Gardner. "We don't want to see this joyous time of year turn tragic for any family."

Throughout the season, officers will be working to keep people safe on the roads. They will be focused on enforcing traffic laws, with attention to impaired and distracted driving, speeding and seat belt/child safety seat violations. There will also be an emphasis on enforcing underage drinking laws.

SAFE SHOPPING: As Black Friday approaches, shoppers are reminded to be careful, prepared, and alert. McGruff the Crime Dog will be visiting local shopping centers through December to share crime prevention messages, such as the following tips:

- When shopping, travel with a group or in pairs, and schedule shopping trips during the day.
- Stay alert, especially when carrying packages or walking on a parking lot or in a garage.
- Avoid carrying too many packages, and leave one hand free to access keys or a phone quickly.
- Park in a well-lit parking space, and select an area where there are other cars and foot traffic.
- Don't leave cell phones, purses or other valuables in a parked car – especially in plain view.
- When loading packages into the car, use the trunk instead of the back seat.

- Beware of strangers approaching you unsolicited. Walk in another direction if you feel uncomfortable.
- When the holidays are over, don't put boxes for electronics or valuables in plain view on recycling day. Break them down first.

PREVENTING PACKAGE THEFTS: Police are also focused on preventing package thefts as deliveries of online purchases increase this time of year. Residents should track shipments and report any thefts by calling 410-313-2200. Additionally, police encourage residents to follow these tips:

- Track shipments and try to be home when they are scheduled to arrive. If you won't be home, have the shipment delivered to your work if permitted.
- Or, ask a trusted neighbor to take the package inside until you get home.
- Be aware of suspicious people and vehicles. If you notice suspicious behavior, call 911 immediately. Make note of any vehicle's make, model, tag number, and direction of travel.

The police department is working to help ensure a safe, happy holiday season for all Howard County residents. Please be smart and safe this holiday season!

Judy and Steve Gottsagen
The Safety and Security Committee