

STERLING POLICE DEPARTMENT PERSONAL SECURITY CIRCULAR

INTRODUCTION

This circular contains valuable information about personal security tips that can help you avoid becoming a victim of crime. The Sterling Police Department believes you can reduce risk to yourself by applying these simple precautions in your daily life.

The City of Sterling is home to all types of people and the majority of them are law-abiding. However, you have no way of knowing who is and who is not. For this reason, you must be prepared to protect yourself. The most important thing to remember is criminals often plan their crimes. They look for the right opportunity and the easiest victim. Therefore, your best defense is a personal security plan aimed at reducing the opportunity for criminals to victimize you. The Sterling Police Department encourages you to practice the following crime prevention measures to increase your personal safety and security:

AT HOME

- Install quality deadbolt locks on all exterior doors and use them. Consider using a four-screw pattern strike plate. Use at least two-inch long screws (so the strike plate is secured to the frame) to secure the strike plate.
- Remember a small chain between the door and doorjamb is not safe. It can be easily broken and pulled out.
- Install quality locks on all windows and use them.
- When a window is left open for ventilation, keep the opening small enough to prevent entry.
- Install a wide-angle viewer (allowing at least 180 degrees viewing) in the doors at all entrances to see who is outside without opening the door.
- Remove or trim shrubbery that hides doors and windows so neighbors or passersby can see someone trying to break into your home.
- Light the outside of your home to discourage prowling or loitering. Use outside floodlights for all entryways, pathways, stairwells and laundry, trash, and parking areas. Connect outside lights to a timing device, motion detector or light sensitive switch so lights switch on automatically during hours of darkness.
- Make a decision about installing an alarm system only after considering such factors as the cost, the reputation of the company and the likelihood of false alarms.
- A watchdog offers additional protection. (Keep in mind the City of Sterling animal control regulations).

IF A STRANGER IS AT YOUR DOOR

- Never indicate you are home alone.
- When home alone, never open your door to a stranger.
- Use your wide angle viewer to see who is at your door.
- Do not open the door to anyone you do not know without first verifying the person's identity. This includes police officers, repair, delivery or salespersons, and political or charity volunteers.
- Ask to see identification.
- Have the person slip their identification card under the door. If you have any doubts about the person, look up the telephone number in the telephone directory and call the company or agency the person claims to represent.
- Do not rely on telephone numbers given to you by strangers at your door. The telephone number they give you could be an accomplice.
- Do not open the door to a stranger requesting help or the use of your telephone. Offer to make the telephone call yourself while the stranger waits outside.
- When a package is delivered, ask that the parcel be left outside the door. Receipts that require a signature can be slipped under the door. Open the door and pick up the package only when you are positive the delivery person has left.
- Never allow a stranger into a security entrance. This includes someone asking to leave a package or a note for a neighbor.
- Children should be trained not to answer the door.
- Place our first initial and last name on mailboxes and building directories. Consider listing a fictitious roommate if you live alone.
- List only your first initial and last name in the telephone directory. Do not list your address.
- Engrave all your valuable property with your driver's license number. Keep a record of the serial numbers of valuable equipment. Photograph or videotape other valuables. Keep photographs, videotapes and records of serial numbers separate from your valuables in a safe at home or in a safe deposit box.
- Before moving into a new residence, change the locks. Previous tenants may still have keys.
- Always lock your door, even if you leave your home for a few minutes.
- Keep venetian blinds and curtains closed, especially at night. Leave lights on in two or more rooms to indicate the presence of other persons (consider using low wattage florescent lights for this).
- Have emergency phone numbers on every phone in the house.

INTRUDERS

- If you are at home and you suspect someone is trying to break in, call 911 immediately;
- If confronted by an intruder, remain as calm as possible;
- Consider your safety and that of your family as the highest priority; and

- Choose a strategy such as negotiating, fleeing, screaming, fighting or complying, whichever seems safest and most effective relative to the situation.

TELEPHONE CALLS

- Do not give your telephone number to wrong telephone number callers. Ask the caller, “What telephone number are you calling?”
- Check references of any person calling seeking information about your for a survey, credit check or subscription drive. Call the agency or company the person works for and verify the identity and intent of the telephone call.
- Never reveal to a stranger or wrong number caller that you are home alone.
- If you receive a threatening, harassing or obscene telephone call, notify the Sterling Police Department and your telephone company.
- Place the receiver down immediately and do not say anything.
- Keep a record of the date, time and the content of each telephone call.

AWAY FROM HOME

- Use timing devices to turn on inside lights and radios to give the appearance that your home is occupied. Setting timers to go on and off at different hours in different rooms is also a good idea.
- If no one will be at home for more than a few days, arrange to have a relative, trusted friend, or neighbor pick up your mail.

RETURNING HOME

- Have your door key in your hand when approaching your entryway.
- At night, keep car headlights on and doors locked until you have looked around to check your garage and parking area.
- If someone else drives you home, ask him or her to wait until you are safely inside.
- Never go into your home if anything seems unusual, such as an open door or a broken window. Leave immediately to a place where you can call the police. Do not go into your home until the police have advised it is safe.

KEY CONTROL

- Give a duplicate house key to a relative, trusted friend or neighbor in case you ever get locked out.
- Do not hide keys in mailboxes, in planters, under doormats, or other places they might be easily found. This will prevent criminals from finding an easy way into your home.
- Do not place personal identification on key rings.
- Be able to separate your car key from all of your other keys. You can purchase a detachable key ring for this purpose.

- Leave only your ignition key with the car when it is valet parked, serviced, or repaired.
- If you lose the keys to your home, change the locks as soon as possible.

APARTMENTS AND CONDOMINIUMS

- Always lock the doors to common areas and garages.
- When leaving or entering a garage, be sure the door closes and locks behind you before moving on.
- Do not leave the garage door opener in your car. If stolen, it provides easy access to your building.
- Organize regular meetings to discuss security issues.
- Contact neighbors in your complex whenever a crime occurs so they may take appropriate precautions.
- Never use a laundry room alone or late at night. Do your laundry during the day and invite a friend or neighbor to do their laundry with you.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

- Get to know your neighbors and discuss your concerns and ideas to improve security in your neighborhood.
- Join or start a Neighborhood Watch program as a method of organizing a network of people interested in working together to improve security.
- Exchange work and vacation schedules with a trusted neighbor so that you can keep an eye on each other's homes.
- Solicit several neighbors to install dead bolt locks and alarm systems at the same time. Purchasing a large quantity of dead bolt locks and alarm systems at the same time might save everyone a considerable amount of money.
- Never tell a stranger that a neighbor lives alone, is ill, or not at home.
- Report broken streetlights to the city street departments.

WALKING

- Avoid walking alone.
- Walk on streets where there are other people.
- Stay alert to your surroundings at all times. Observe people and activities around you. Look confident and purposeful when you walk.
- Plan and use the safest and most direct route to your destination.
- Choose busy, well-lighted streets and avoid isolated areas, alleys, vacant lots, abandoned buildings and construction sites.
- Walk near the curb and do not pass too close to shrubbery, dark doorways and other places of concealment.
- Avoid shortcuts.

- Become familiar with stores and gas stations that stay open late at night, as well as Sterling Police, Sheriff, State Police, and Fire Department locations.
- Walk facing traffic so you can see approaching cars.
- Carry a flashlight during hours of darkness.
- Be aware that wearing earphones connected to portable radios, cassette, and CD players while walking can distract you and make you less able to sense potential danger.
- Always bring change with you for cab fare, bus fare, or telephone calls. Keep some extra money separate from your wallet or purse for emergencies.
- Never hitchhike and do not accept rides from strangers.
- Carry a personal alarm (e.g. a whistle). Use the alarm to attract attention and to summon help if you feel you are in danger. Carry the alarm in your hand so that you can use it immediately.
- If followed or threatened by someone in a car, use your personal alarm or scream loud and long, cross the street and run in the opposite direction. This will force the driver to turn the car around to pursue you. Try to obtain the license plate number and a description of the car and its occupant(s).
- If followed or threatened by someone walking use your personal alarm or scream loud and long, cross the street and run. Head for bright lights and people.
- Do not display money or credit cards.
- Unless absolutely necessary, never wear expensive jewelry or carry large amounts of cash.
- Keep your money and wallet in the inside pocket of your jacket or purse.
- Secure your purse or handbag under your arm so that it cannot be easily snatched.
- When arriving home by taxicab, request the driver to wait until you are inside the house safely.
- Have your key ready so you can open the door to your house as soon as possible.
- If anything is suspicious, do not go inside. Call 911 from a neighbor's house.

DRIVING

- Travel on busy, well-lighted streets.
- Keep your car in good running order.
- Keep your car in gear while waiting at traffic signals and stop signs. If you are approached and threatened, honk the horn and drive away.
- Plan your route in advance, particularly on unfamiliar trips. Have enough gasoline and money to get you there and back. Never allow your gasoline gauge to fall below the quarter tank level.
- Drive with all car doors locked.
- Keep the windows rolled up whenever possible.
- Keep your wallet, purse and other valuables out of sight while driving. Do not leave them on the seat next to you. Place personal items in the glove compartment, under a front seat or in the trunk.
- Do not store valuable items in your car.

- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- Try carpooling or sharing rides with others. This will save money and you will have help in case of an emergency.
- Keep spare money in your car for a taxi, bus fare or telephone calls in case of a breakdown.
- If you see another motorist in trouble, do not stop. As you drive by, signal the motorist that you are going to get help. Find a pay phone or use your cellular phone to call for assistance.
- If the driver of another car tries to force your car off the road, do not stop. Continue driving to an open business, police, sheriff, or fire station. Try to obtain the license number and description of the car, driver and passengers. Report the incident to the police.
- If you are driving during late or odd hours, be aware that commuter routes congested during rush hours may be deserted. Use freeways and main thoroughfares and avoid alternate, less traveled roads as much as possible.
- If you travel a regular route to and from work, make yourself familiar with businesses on the route that stay open late in case you need emergency assistance.
- Be alert to your surroundings at all times while driving and when you are getting in and out of your car.
- Do not let yourself be distracted while driving. Do not apply cosmetics, read or make a call on your cellular telephone.
- Drive in the lane closest to the center of the roadway when traveling in an unknown area, or areas you determine to be unsafe. Leave enough space between your car and the car in front of you to enable you to go around the car quickly if necessary.
- Keep your car keys and house keys on separate key rings.
- Minor car accidents are sometimes planned by criminals to set up a “bump and rob” or “carjacking”. If you feel your car was bumped intentionally, remain in your locked car. Signal the other driver to follow you to a safe place.

PARKING

- Choose well-lighted parking areas.
- Look around for loiterers before you get out of your car.
- Keep valuables and packages locked in the trunk.
- Always turn off the ignition, remove the key, and lock your car doors, no matter how soon you plan on returning.
- Do not park next to vans, trucks with campers or other vehicles whose size and structure can provide concealment for a potential assailant.
- Exercise caution and be extra alert when using underground or enclosed parking garages. Walk in the center aisle, rather close to parked cars.
- If you have a choice, park in areas that have an attendant or in locations that have heavy pedestrian traffic.

RETURNING TO YOUR CAR

- Have your key in hand before you get to your car.
- Be aware of occupied cars around you.
- If you are carrying packages, try to keep one hand free, even if it means making an extra trip.
- Check outside, under and inside your car before you unlock the door and get in. Criminals have been known to conceal themselves on the floorboards behind the front seats.
- Criminals have also been known to disable an engine or flatten a tire to strand a targeted victim. The victim is then approached, offered assistance and attacked. If your car is disabled in suspicious circumstances and a stranger offers to help you, use your personal alarm, scream loud and long and leave the area immediately. If there is no time to flee, get into your car, lock the doors and sound the horn to attract attention to the situation. Try to obtain a good description of the suspect and report the incident to the Sterling Police Department and store security.

CAR TROUBLE

- If possible, steer to a busy, well lighted area.
- Set the parking brake and turn on emergency flashers.
- If you have a cellular telephone, use it to summon assistance.
- Wait inside your car with the doors locked and the windows closed until the Sterling Police, State Patrol, Sheriff, or other trusted person arrives to assist you.
- If someone stops and offers to help you, do not get out of the car.
- Never leave with a person to seek help. Ask the person to help by calling the Sterling Police or a towing service for you. Do not roll down the window, even slightly, communicate with the person through the closed window.

IF FOLLOWED WHILE DRIVING

- Drive to the nearest police or fire station for assistance.
- Drive to an open gasoline station, grocery store, or other business where you can safely call the police.
- Keep driving until you find a safe area. In the meantime attract attention to your situation by honking the horn in rapid, short blasts and by turning on the emergency flashers.
- Attempt to obtain the license plate number and a description of the car following you.
- Do not drive home or pull over to the side of the road or turn into a driveway. You could be trapped.

AUTOMATED TELLER MACHINE

- Memorize your personal identification number (PIN). Do not carry your PIN anywhere on your person or in your wallet.
- Never give your PIN to anyone else.
- When using an automated teller machine (ATM) have your paperwork and ATM card ready before you arrive at the ATM.
- Be aware of people around the ATM and in parked cars who seem to loitering or subtly watching customers transact business. If you feel uncomfortable, leave the location and find another ATM where you can safely transact your business.
- Report suspicious persons to bank personnel.
- When using a drive up ATM always keep alert to your surroundings. Be sure your car doors are locked and the windows are closed. Look around and check the area before you open your car window to make sure it is safe to do so. Open the window long enough to conduct your transaction and leave the location promptly.
- Do not sit in the car at the ATM and do your personal accounting.
- Never use an ATM after dark.
- When using a walk up ATM always keep alert to your surroundings. Choose an ATM in a shopping mall, market or an ATM that is in a bank or located near a busy street.
- Make sure the ATM is not obscured by landscaping or walls.
- Always take someone with you.
- Shield the screen with your body to prevent others from seeing your PIN.
- Place your money in your pocket, purse, or wallet before you turn away from the ATM.
- Take the receipt with you.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- Locate convenient, well lighted, frequently used bus stops.
- Check public transportation schedules in advance, especially if traveling at odd hours.
- Do not wait alone at a bus stop.
- Know where you are going and how to get back.
- When you board a bus, sit near the driver.
- If you are verbally or physically harassed, report the incident to the bus driver immediately.
- Be alert who gets off the bus with you.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel you are being followed, inform other passengers getting off with you or walk to a place where there are other people for assistance. Report the incident to Sterling Police as soon as possible.

AT WORK

- Become actively involved in working with your employer to improve security in and around your work place.

- If possible, get into the habit of traveling to and from work and parking areas with other people.
- Park in areas that are patrolled and well lighted after dark.
- Avoid using isolated, deserted stairways in office buildings.
- If a suspicious looking person follows you onto an elevator, step out of the elevator immediately.
- When using elevators, stand near the control panel by the door so you can easily press the alarm button in an emergency.
- Lock valuables such as a purse, wallet and keys in desk drawers or other secured area.
- Do not advertise your vacation plans, times you will be away from home or the amount of cash you are carrying.
- Observe security measures when using restrooms in office buildings. If the facilities are locked, never leave the door unlocked or give the key to an unauthorized person. Do not enter the restroom if the lock appears broken or the door is ajar. If the facilities are not kept locked, enter cautiously and check the area thoroughly before closing the door behind you.
- Avoid working late or odd hours if possible. If you must work late or an odd hour, alert a family member, friend or security officer. If possible, have a security officer check on you from time to time. Ask a security officer, coworker or an employee to escort you to your car or to public transportation. Do not walk to your car alone if you can avoid it.
- Report all suspicious persons and activities to security personnel.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

When biking, jogging, roller blading or participating in other outdoor activities, remember the following:

- Choose a route in advance that is safe and populated.
- Always carry proper identification.
- Advise a loved one or a friend the route you will be taking so they will know where to look for you in an emergency.
- Vary your route and activity schedule so that your behavior is not predictable.
- Avoid pursuing outdoor activities after dark.
- Know businesses that are open and the locations of the Sterling Police, Sheriff, State Patrol, and Fire Departments along your route.
- Keep your exercise gear in good repair and carry the necessary tools in case of an emergency.
- Consider carrying a personal alarm.

IF YOU ARE ATTACKED

Be physically and psychologically prepared to defend yourself. Start by preparing an inventory of your personal skills. Think about how you usually respond during a confrontation. What is

your style? Do you fight, run, cry, or freeze? Think through various strategies. Talk with other people about ways to handle confrontations and rehearse alternatives. By preparing, you will have more options to choose from if you ever find yourself in a confrontation.

Every confrontation is different. The best response depends on a combination of many factors, such as the location of the incident, characteristics of the assailant, the presence of weapons, and your personal skills and available resources. Your most effective weapon on a confrontation is your own judgment.

Only you can decide how you will respond to a given situation. When faced with danger, trust yourself. Stay as calm as possible. Think rationally, without panic. Find a way to escape.

Evaluate the situation and the options available to you. The following strategies may be effective in confrontations:

- Non resistance
- Negotiating
- Stalling for time
- Distracting or diverting the assailant and fleeing
- Verbal assertiveness
- Screaming or using a personal alarm to attract attention
- Physically resisting and fighting off the assailant

ASSESSMENT

Keep assessing any situation as it is happening. Never give up. If the first strategy you choose does not work, try another strategy. Observe as much as you can about the identity, clothing, and behavior of the assailant. This information will be important and useful for the police investigation.

REPORTING CRIME

Be alert and observant wherever you are and learn to recognize signs of criminal behavior. Report all crime to the Sterling Police Department, even if it is only an attempt. Crime cannot be controlled or prevented if it is not reported. By reporting crimes and suspicious activities, you can protect yourself and others. For more information on crime prevention techniques, contact the Sterling Police Crime Prevention Unit at 815-632-6640.