



PARTNERS IN CRIME PREVENTION

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CHRISTMAS SHOPPING—NEW EMPHASIS ON ONLINE SAFETY

COVID –19 has turn our lives upside down. With state mandated shut downs and concerns about the spread of COVID-19 more and more people have been relying on online shopping to purchase items that they need and want.

The pandemic has probably helped the trend toward online shopping that has been occurring over the last several years. And this trend provides new opportunities for criminals to steal.

Earlier this year, the Federal Trade Commission said that it had received a significant increase in reports of unreceived orders. While that was in the context of personal protective equipment in the early stages of the pandemic, we can expect scammers to continue to try to steal our money and our identities.

Christmas shopping gives thieves more opportunity to steal. Traditionally that has meant car prowls and home burglaries. But as we have relied more on online shopping, the threat of theft has changed.

The threat has expanded from a local burglar or car prowler to someone who could be on the other side of the country or on the other side of the world who can set up a web site that looks legitimate, or

who sends robocalls, emails and/or text messages to lure you to fake web sites that collect your personal information or insert malware that collects information from your computer or sends out spam to other computers.

A tie to local crime remains with “porch pirates” who troll neighborhoods looking for packages on front porches to steal.

We can protect ourselves from becoming victimized online like we can going to the store. We offer a few tips that you can use to protect yourself.

The Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office wishes all of you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



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VIDEO CONFERENCING- STAYING SAFE ONLINE

Online video conferencing has become much more important during the pandemic whether it be for business or socializing. However, there have been press reports of hackers interrupting meetings sometimes with racist and lewd language.

To protect your meeting and yourself follow these tips,

- *Use unique passwords and/or ID numbers for each meeting if offered by the software. Check out security features such as approving participants before joining a conference.*
- *Keep your video conferencing software up to date directly from the service's website.*
- *Don't open unexpected video conference invitations. An unexpected invitation might be a phishing ploy.*
- *Protect your privacy by watching what you share during video conferences and learning the how you can mute audio or turn off video in the software.*

HOLIDAY SHOPPING- PROTECTING YOURSELF ONLINE

With the growth of online shopping, consumers have the convenience of ordering goods and having them delivered to their homes.

While shoppers can take advantage of the convenience of online shopping, there are pitfalls. Fraudsters can set up a fake web site, take your money, and your personal information, and not deliver what you ordered. Others can use phishing tactics to fool you into giving your personal information.

You can take practical actions to protect yourself.

Be sure you are secure. Make sure that you are updating your computer or mobile device for its antivirus software. Use good password discipline, long passwords, no two accounts using the same password. A password manager can help. Also, where you can use two-factor authentication.

Checkout online vendors before doing business. While not perfect, most larger vendors will have robust security measures to prevent hacking into their computer systems. An old rule of thumb is to look for the "https://" to be sure that you have a secure link. While still good advice, fraudsters are now making their websites secure.

Verify that you are ordering from a legitimate vendor. Do a search on the business name with the word "scam" and see what comes up. Be wary of brand new web sites, they are more likely to be scammers.

When paying, use a credit card. Don't use a debit card! Also, dedicate a credit card to your online transactions. This would make it easier to regularly check out your statement for unusual transactions. Also, using a mobile payment service like Apple Pay or Google Pay, helps protect your credit card if the mobile payment information is stolen.

Don't take the phishing bait. Scammers will send phishing emails to trick people into giving their personal information. And the Christmas shopping season is the perfect time to trick frazzled online shoppers.

Phishing scammers have used COVID-19 as a lure to convince victims to click on links to bad web sites or download files with malware. During the holidays, scammers will send out phishing emails claiming to be from the Postal Service, FEDEX or UPS that says there is a problem with a package. Be wary of unsolicited emails, especially if they warn of dire consequences for not acting.

Do not click on any links from suspicious emails. If you need to, go directly to the service's web site to conduct your business.



HOLIDAY SHOPPING– PROTECTING YOUR DELIVERIES

After you have made your online order, you need to receive your purchase. Package delivery remains fraught with thieves (porch pirates) trolling neighborhoods to find packages on front porches to take.

Some things you can do to reduce the chances of your package being stolen include,

Have the package delivered to another location. This can be to a UPS Store, FEDEX Store, your local Post Office, or an Amazon Locker. You can also have it delivered to a trusted neighbor who you know can retrieve the package promptly.

Going to be out of town? Have the package held until you return. The Postal Service has its “hold mail” service that will hold your mail for a minimum of 3 days and a maximum of 30 days. You can have a vacation hold with FEDEX for up to 14 days.

Use the delivery service’s tracking features. Tracking your package allows you to know when you can expect it on your porch. UPS, for example, has a service called UPS My Choice that allows you to track a package and re-route it if needed.

Request a signature. You can ask for a signature on delivery. If you are not at home to receive the package, it will not be left on the porch.

Give special instructions. If you are having the package delivered at home, you can give instructions to have it left somewhere out of sight of the street. This could be on the side of the house, on the back porch, or some other easy hiding place.

Consider installing a security camera. A security camera on your front porch can help you know who is at your front door. Some cameras will send you a text or email when they see motion in their field of view. Also, a camera that records images or video allows you to provide evidence to law enforcement in case your package is stolen.

Pick up promptly. If you are having the package delivered to your home, try to pick up from your porch as soon after it is delivered as you can. If you are away for the day, have a trusted neighbor pick it up for you.

FEDEX- <https://www.fedex.com/en-us/delivery-manager/how-to-prevent-stolen-missing-packages.html>

UPS- <https://www.ups.com/us/en/services/knowledge-center/article.page?name=how-to-keep-packages-safe-from-porch-pirates&kid=art16a45bd35dd>

USPS- <https://uspsblog.com/postal-inspection-service-tips/>

HOLIDAY SHOPPING- PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM THEFT

The latest Washington State proclamation limits in-store retail to 25% of indoor occupancy limits, so you might need to go to the store for some of your holiday shopping. Here are a few tips,

- *Try to park as close to the entrance of the mall or store as possible. At night, park under a light whenever possible.*
- *Make a note of your parking spot so that you don't have to wander around the parking lot after shopping.*
- *Don't leave packages or valuables visible on the seats or floor of your car.*
- *Stay alert in crowds to protect your valuables. A thief can use the cover of the crowd to make a quick getaway after stealing your wallet or shopping bag.*

PRESENTS UNDER THE TREE- PROTECT THEM FROM BURGLARS

You have safely selected and purchased your gifts. Now they are in your home ready to wrap and sit under your tree. This is a time of year when burglars steal Christmas gifts from homes. You can improve the security of your gifts through the following steps:

- Always secure and lock your doors and windows, even if you are just popping out or when you are in the back garden - about one in four burglaries happen simply because the householder left windows or doors unlocked.
- Make sure your security lights are in working order and put internal lamps on timer switches to come on when dark if you are away.
- If you have a security system, use it.
- Don't hide your house keys near a door. Burglars know all of the secret hiding places
- Don't leave Christmas presents under the tree in full view of burglars who may be peering through windows - keep them in a secure place until the big day.
- Don't put your empty boxes from Christmas presents (or any new purchases) out until your recycling collection day and make sure you break up the boxes and secure them together - the boxes and wrappings provide burglars with just the information they are looking for to see what new gadgets and items await them inside.
- Note down the serial numbers of all electronic goods such as TVs, videos, computers, and camera equipment and keep the list out of sight in a secure place. Also photograph valuable items such as jewelry.

AUTO THEFT PREVENTION CHECKLIST

- √ All vehicle doors locked
- √ All windows rolled up
- √ All personal belongings have been removed or stored in the trunk
- √ Vehicle is parked in a well-lighted area
- √ Vehicle is parked in a high-visibility location (avoid isolated areas)
- √ Anti-theft device on (Club, alarm system, kill-switch)



OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOODS

MAKING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFER

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/311/Office-of-Neighborhoods>

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SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRIME PREVENTION WEB PAGE:

<http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/289/Crime-Prevention>

NEWSLETTER INFO

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If you have questions regarding this newsletter or any articles that appear in it, please contact the editor at neighborhoodwatch@snoco.org

TIP LINES



Snohomish County Sheriff's Office: 425-388-3845

<http://snohomishcountywa.gov/303/Anonymous-Tips>

Crime Stoppers of Puget Sound: 1-800-222-8477