



Black Mountain Police Department Crime Prevention Tips for Seniors

Crime prevention is everyone's responsibility, not just a job for law enforcement. Seniors can learn how to protect themselves from crime by following these simple, common sense suggestions. Share these tips with your neighbors and friends and make it tough for criminals to work in your neighborhood.

At Home...

- Install good locks on doors and windows. Use them! (75% of burglaries involving seniors involve unlocked doors and windows, and less than half of these are reported.)
- Keep your home well lit at night inside and out and keep your curtains closed at night.
- Install a peephole in your front door so you can see callers without opening the door.
- Ask for proper identification from deliverymen or strangers. Don't be afraid of asking – if they are legitimate they won't mind.
- If a stranger asks to use your telephone, offer to place the call for him yourself. Never let a stranger into your home.
- Do not leave notes on your door when you are gone and do not hide your keys under the mat or in mailboxes or other conspicuous places. Instead, leave an extra set of keys with a trusted neighbor or friend.
- Never give out information over the phone indicating you are alone or won't be home at a certain time. Don't use the word "I" on an answering machine; use "we" instead. Tape your answering machine message in a male voice.
- When you are gone for more than a day, make sure your home looks and sounds occupied – use automatic timers to turn on lights and a radio or television. Place your residence on the police department's extra patrol checklist. Cancel regular deliveries such as newspapers and have the post office hold your mail. Have your lawn maintained while you are gone.
- Keep an inventory with serial numbers and photographs of resalable appliances, antiques and furniture. **LEAVE COPIES IN A SAFE PLACE.**
- Consider a home alarm system that provides emergency monitoring for burglary, fire, and medical emergencies.

- Don't hesitate to report crime or suspicious activities. Remember that a concerned neighbor is the best protection against crime because suspicious persons and activities are noticed and reported to police promptly.

Confidence scams...

- Don't fall for anything that sounds too good to be true – a free vacation, sweepstakes prizes, cures for cancer and arthritis, a low-risk, high-yield investment scheme.
- Be wary of unsolicited offers to make repairs to your home. Deal only with reputable businesses.
- Never give your credit card, phone card, Social Security, or bank account number to anyone over the phone. It's illegal for telemarketers to ask for these numbers to verify a prize or gift.
- Never withdraw money from your bank accounts for anyone except YOURSELF.
- Don't let anyone rush you into signing anything – an insurance policy, a sales agreement, a contract. Read it carefully and have someone you trust check it over.
- Beware of individuals claiming to represent companies, consumer organizations, or government agencies that offer to recover lost money from fraudulent telemarketers for a fee.
- If you're suspicious, check it out with the police, the Better Business Bureau, Chamber of Commerce or your local consumer protection office. Call the National Consumer's League Fraud Information Center at 800-876-7060

While you're out...

- Carry your purse very close to you – don't dangle it from your arm. Never leave your purse in a shopping cart or otherwise unattended. Carry your wallet in an inside jacket or front pants pocket.
- Don't carry more cash than is necessary. Many grocery stores now accept checks and automatic teller cards instead of cash. Carry only the credit cards you need.
- There is strength in numbers; avoid walking alone, especially at night or in high-risk areas.
- Walk along a planned well-lighted route with purpose and confidence, avoiding buildings and doorways.
- Don't display large sums of cash in public.
- Have your keys ready when you approach the door.
- Don't carry weapons – they may be used against you.
- Have your paychecks or government checks sent directly to your bank account – many banks have senior citizens discounts.

In your car...

- Keep your gas tank full and your engine properly maintained to avoid breakdowns.
- Always lock all your car doors, even when you're inside. Many insurance companies will not cover thefts that occur when doors are left unlocked. Keep your windows rolled up. Driving with the windows closed also improves gas mileage.
- Lock packages and other valuables in the trunk. Do not leave them on the back seat or on the floor of the car where potential thieves can see them.
- When you return to your car, always check the front and back seat before you get in.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- If your car breaks down, pull over to the right as far as possible, raise the hood, turn on emergency flashers, and wait *inside* the car for help. Do not get out of the car or roll down the window until the police arrive

If you are a victim...

- If you arrive home and suspect a stranger may be inside, **DON'T GO IN.** *Leave quietly and call 911 or 669-8072 to report the crime.* (You may want to program the Black Mountain Police Department's emergency number, 669-8072, into your phone for automatic dial.)
- If you are attacked on the street, make as much noise as possible by calling for help or blowing a whistle. Do not pursue your attacker. *Call 911 or 669-8072 and report the crime as soon as possible.* Take mental notes of the assailant's physical appearance, clothing description, hairstyle, scars, tattoos, etc.
- If you have been swindled or conned, report the crime to your local police or District Attorney's office. Con artists count on their victim's reluctance to admit they have been duped, but if you delay, you help them get away. Remember, if you never report the crime, they are free to cheat others again and again and you have no chance of getting your money back.