

***Greeting and Salutations!*** In this section of the website the Town of Chester Police will provide tips about how to avoid being a victim and remaining safe. While many of the issues discussed are not reported within the Town of Chester many residents are commuters and these tips can be applied at work and even on vacation to protect you, your family and your belongings.

Respectfully,

*Sgt. Norman J. Vitale*



## Home and Neighborhood Safety

Crime rates are falling. Many people who were once driven inside their homes, behind locked doors, are back sitting on their porches, enjoying their parks, and walking to their corner stores. It's not like that everywhere of course, but progress has been made.

According to statistics compiled by the [Bureau of Justice Statistics at the U.S. Department of Justice](#), total personal property crime has declined from a high of 553.6 incidents per 1,000 households in 1975 to just 161.1 incidents per 1,000 in 2004 - and it bottomed out at 159 in 2002. Burglary was down from 111.8 incidents per 1,000 households in 1974 to a low of 27.7 incidents per 1,000 in 2002. Theft was also down, from a high of 424.1 incidents per 1,000 households in 1975 to just 122.8 in 2004.

While crime is still cause for very serious concern, our homes and communities are safer than they've been in decades, and this is quite likely due, at least in part, to the twin pillars of prevention and community policing.

### Tips

- Organize neighborhood cleanup days to send the message that your community is closed to thieves, vandals, and loiterers.
- Sponsor a Neighborhood Watch. If interested in starting a Neighborhood Watch contact Police Officer Kenny @ 845-469-7000 ext.332.
- Be sure the outside doors of your home or business have strong deadbolt locks.
- Keep spare keys with a trusted neighbor or nearby shopkeeper, not under a doormat or planter, on a ledge, or in the mailbox.
- Lock gates, garage doors, and shed doors after every use.
- Illuminate or eliminate places an intruder might hide: the spaces between trees or shrubbery, stairwells, alleys, hallways, and entryways.

- Set timers on lights when you're away from home or your business is closed so it appears to be occupied.
- Keep your bike and sports equipment inside the house when they're not in use.
- Avoid confrontations with burglars.



## Personal Safety

Many people cite crime and fear of crime as a determining factor in how they feel about their neighborhood, but in fact criminal victimization in 2004 was at its lowest level since 1973, according to the [Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics](#).

Figures for murder, rape, robbery, and assault were highest in the early 1980s, peaking in 1982 at 52.3 victimizations per 1,000 people age 12 and over. But by 2004 this figure had dropped to 21.1 per 1,000. The decline in violent victimization was experienced by persons in every demographic category surveyed - gender, race, origin, and household income.

Young people ages 12 to 24 were still the victims of the most violent crimes (an average of 83.7 victimizations per 1,000 people), while those 65 or older were victimized at a much lower rate (9.1 per 1,000 persons). While violent crime was down, crimes that used modern technology were up: identity theft cost consumers some \$5 billion in 2004, according to the [U.S. Postal Service](#). Preventing crime is everyone's business - children, youth, adults, and seniors must all work together to protect themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods.

### Tips

- Make sure you have sturdy metal or solid wood doors at all entries into your home and that sliding glass and similar doors are properly secured.
- Trim the shrubbery around your doors and windows so crooks don't have a place to hide.
- Do not give out personal information over the phone, through the mail, or over the Internet unless you have initiated the contact or know with whom you are dealing.
- If you're a senior, use direct deposit for your Social Security check and other regular payments.
- If you notice someone following you when you're driving, head for the nearest busy, brightly lighted area. Write down the license number and make and model of the car. Call 911 or your local emergency number.
- Always lock car doors and take the keys when you leave your car, even if you'll be gone "just for a minute."
- Don't leave valuables in view in the car. Leave them in the trunk or, better yet, take them home immediately.

- As you walk down the street or through the parking garage, walk alertly and assertively. Don't weigh yourself down with too many parcels. Take several loads to the car if necessary.
- If you carry a purse, hold it close to your body; if a wallet, keep it in a front pocket.
- Don't display your cash or any other inviting targets such as pagers, cell phones, hand-held electronic games, or expensive jewelry and clothing.
- When traveling, carry only the credit and ATM cards you absolutely need. Leave the others at home, safely stored.
- Make sure your home is secure when you are traveling—all deadbolts locked, lights left on timers, newspapers stopped, and mail held at the post office or collected by a trusted neighbor who has your travel schedule.
- When away from your residence for an extended period time the Town of Chester Police Department conducts House Security Checks, the form can be completed on this website in the Forms section.



## Work Safety

Many people spend a good portion of their time at work. This means it's just as important to use crime prevention skills in the workplace as it is at home and in the neighborhood. Whether the place of business is corporate headquarters, a restaurant, a store, an auto repair shop, or a person's home, common-sense prevention skills can make the workday safer for everyone.

The manager or owner of a business will have additional concerns as he or she must be on the lookout for vandalism, shoplifting, fraud, and other problems. In addition, employers need to make sure their employees are safe not only from unauthorized "visitors" or angry customers but, at times, from each other. This means employers must be careful in hiring, verifying references and credentials, and doing background checks when appropriate. And every company, no matter how small, should have an emergency plan in place.

### Tips

- Keep your purse, wallet, keys, or other valuables with you at all times or locked in a drawer or closet.
- Check the identity of any strangers who are in your office. If anyone makes you uncomfortable, inform security or management immediately.
- Don't stay late if you'll be alone in the office. Create a buddy system for walking to parking lots or public transportation after hours, or ask a security guard to escort you.

- Report any broken or flickering lights, dimly lit corridors, broken windows, and doors that don't lock properly.
- If you notice signs of potential violence in a fellow employee, report this to the appropriate person. Immediately report any incidents of sexual harassment.
- Know your company's emergency plan. If your company does not have such a plan, volunteer to help develop one.
- If the company does not supply an emergency kit, keep your own emergency supplies (flashlight, walking shoes, water bottle, nonperishable food, etc.) in a desk drawer.
- If you work at home, in addition to making your home safe and secure, you should hang window treatments that obstruct the view into your office. You don't want to advertise your expensive office equipment.
- Review your insurance policy—almost all policies require an extra rider to cover a home office.
- Mark your equipment with identification numbers, and keep an updated inventory list (with photos, if possible) in a home safe or a bank safe-deposit box. It's a good idea to keep backups of your work in a secure, separate location as well.
- Follow the same caution with deliveries and pickups that businesses do. Anyone making a delivery to your home office should be properly identified before you open the door. Do not let the person enter your home. If you own the company, take a hard look at your business—physical layout, employees, hiring practices, operating procedures, and special security risks. Assess the company's vulnerability to all kinds of crime, from burglary to embezzlement. Follow basic crime prevention principles, and work with local law enforcement to protect your business.



## Violence

The news is full of stories about people who have been raped, robbed, mugged, or otherwise assaulted, and everyone cringes when they hear these reports. Who hasn't feared becoming one of these victims? The truth, however, is that the incidence of personal violence has dropped to its lowest level in almost three decades.

Violent crime - murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault - was down from a high of 52.3 incidents per 1,000 people in 1981 to just 21.1 incidents per 1,000 in 2004, according to statistics compiled by the [Bureau of Justice Statistics at the U.S. Department of Justice](#). Aggravated assault - which involves attack with a weapon or attack without a weapon that results in serious injury - was down even more sharply,

from 12.4 incidents per 1,000 people in 1977 to just 4.3 incidents per 1,000 in 2004.

Everyone - and this applies to residents of big cities, small towns, and even rural areas - needs to be careful, but these lower rates of crime are evidence that if people are vigilant and take common-sense precautions, crime can be prevented.

### **Tips**

- Don't walk or jog early in the morning or late at night when the streets are deserted.
- When out at night, try to have a friend walk with you.
- Carry only the money you'll need on a particular day.
- Don't display your cash or any other inviting targets such as pagers, cell phones, hand-held electronic games, or expensive jewelry and clothing.
- If you think someone is following you, switch directions or cross the street. If the person continues to follow you, move quickly toward an open store or restaurant or a lighted house. Don't be afraid to yell for help.
- Try to park in well-lighted areas with good visibility and close to walkways, stores, and people.
- Make sure you have your key out as you approach your door.
- Always lock your car, even if it's in your own driveway; never leave your motor running.
- Do everything you can to keep a stranger from getting into your car or to keep a stranger from forcing you into his or her car.
- If a dating partner has abused you, do not meet him or her alone. Do not let him or her in your home or car when you are alone.
- If you are a battered spouse, call the police or sheriff immediately. Assault is a crime, whether committed by a stranger or your spouse or any other family member. If you believe that you and your children are in danger, call a crisis hotline or a health center (the police can also make a referral) and leave immediately.
- If someone tries to rob you, give up your property—don't give up your life.
- If you are robbed or assaulted, report the crime to the police. Try to describe the attacker accurately. Your actions can help prevent someone else from becoming a victim.



# Fraud

It's not always easy to spot con artists. They invade your home through the telephone, computer, and mail; advertise in well-known newspapers and magazines; and come through your door. Most people think they're too smart to fall for a scam, but the opposite is true.

The [National Consumer League's National Fraud Information Center](#) reported that from January to September 2005, online auctions accounted for 42 percent of all complaints received. Far worse, the average loss was an astounding \$1,129. The loss to consumers from identity theft was \$5 billion in 2004, with an average loss of \$400, \$1,440 if the crime was committed online.

One particularly insidious type of crime preys on the goodwill of the American public: charity fraud, which increases at times of national tragedies and natural disasters. (According to the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance, Americans gave \$200 billion to charity in 2000.) Anyone can fall victim to these crooks: Almost without fail, they're well-mannered, friendly, and helpful—at least at first.

## Tips

- Make sure you understand how an online auction works before you bid on merchandise.
- Investigate the seller as much as possible. Be wary if the seller has only a post office box address or an email address.
- Bid at auction houses only if there's insurance to protect the buyer or an escrow account where your money will be held until you receive your merchandise.
- Always use a credit card for your auction purchase so that you can dispute the charge if necessary; never use a wire transfer, money order, or personal check.
- To protect yourself against exorbitant charges, make sure you know the shipping and handling charges up front.
- To foil identity thieves, never give out your Social Security number or other personal information.
- Shred all bills, bank statements, and "pre-approved" credit card offers before you put them in the trash.
- Don't have new checks mailed to you at home; pick them up at the bank.
- When someone asks you for a contribution to a charity, call the charity and make sure it is soliciting in your neighborhood.
- Make your check out to the name of the charitable organization, never to the person who is doing the soliciting, and mail it directly to the charity.



# Keep Your Identity To Yourself

According to the [U.S. Postal Service](#), there were almost ten million incidents of identity theft in the United States in 2004 at a cost of \$5 billion to consumers. Victims report spending 30 hours, on average, cleaning up after an identity crime at an average cost of \$500.

It's in the newspapers every day and on the news every night. People worry that someone will run up charges on their credit card or fleece their bank account while their back is turned. There is reason to worry. All a thief needs is your Social Security number to commit identity theft. This crime is relatively easy to commit, but investigating and prosecuting it is complex and time-consuming. But once you know the facts and some preventive measures you can take, you can win the fight against identity theft!

Identity thieves commit their crime in several ways:

- They steal credit card payments and other outgoing mail from private, curbside mailboxes.
- They dig through garbage cans or communal dumpsters in search of cancelled checks, credit card and bank statements, and pre-approved credit card offers.
- They hack into computers that contain personal records and steal the data.
- They file a change of address form in the victim's name to divert mail and gather personal and financial data.



## Technology

Electronic technology has become an everyday fact of life. We use it to communicate, to bank, to shop, to learn, to be entertained, and to be treated medically, among countless applications.

In the right hands, technology has the power to transform our lives in ways that only a generation ago we could never have imagined. But in the wrong hands, technology can lead to identity theft, online auction fraud, child abduction, and many other crimes.

Children, who are most at risk, learn about computers and the Internet at an early age. But just as you wouldn't let children cross a busy road without some safety rules, you shouldn't send them onto the information superhighway without teaching them the rules

of the road. Too many dangerous people can reach children - and adults - through the Internet. Today's technology is a wonderful tool, but you must know how to use it safely.

## **Tips**

- To guard against identity theft, never give out your Social Security number. Treat it as confidential information.
- Commit all passwords to memory. Never write them down or carry them with you.
- When using an ATM machine, make sure no one is hovering over you and can see you enter your password.
- When participating in an online auction, try to pay the seller directly with a credit card so you can dispute the charges if the merchandise does not arrive or was misrepresented. If possible, avoid paying by check or money order.
- Adopt an attitude of healthy skepticism toward websites that offer prizes or giveaways. Chances are, all that's been "won" is the opportunity to buy something you didn't want in the first place.
- Choose a commercial online service that offers parental control features.
- Tell your children never to give out their address telephone number password school name or any other personal information.
- Make sure your children know to never agree to meet face-to-face with someone they've met online without discussing it with you. Only if you decide that it's okay to meet their "cyber-friend" should they arrange to meet this person, and then the meeting should be in a familiar public place in the presence of a trusted adult.
- Tell your children never to respond to messages that have bad words, are scary, or just seem weird.
- Tell your children never to enter an area that charges for services without asking you first.
- Tell children never send a picture of themselves to anyone without your permission.
- Make sure that access to the Internet at your children's school is monitored by adults.





# Preventing Senior Telemarketing Fraud

Many legitimate companies and charities solicit consumers by phone and consider it an effective way to raise money or increase company business. Unfortunately, others are simply up to no good. The National Crime Prevention Council believes seniors can prevent telemarketing fraud by being educated consumers. [According to the FTC](#), nearly 25 million Americans are victims of consumer fraud each year. Senior citizens continue to be a rapidly increasing segment of the population, and that makes them a prime target for con artists and thieves. Americans who are 65 or older represent about 13 percent of our country's population, and their population will only continue to grow as the Baby Boomer generation begins to enter that age range.

Studies have shown that senior citizens are more at risk to be targeted by telemarketing scams than other age groups, and fraudulent telemarketers direct anywhere from 56 to 80 percent of their calls at older Americans. These con artists believe that senior citizens are vulnerable and more susceptible to their tricks. However, NCPC is helping many seniors to be shrewd and savvy citizens by keeping these tips in mind:

## Tips

- Offers too good to be true usually are. Ask to receive the “unbelievable deal” or the “amazing prize offer” in writing so you can read it carefully before making a commitment.
- Never give out your personal information over the phone or Internet unless you have initiated the contact. Legitimate business callers will never ask you for this information over the phone.
- If a caller asks you to pay for an offer in advance or asks for your credit card number or Social Security number, tell the person *you don't give out personal information over the telephone.*
- Remember that legitimate telemarketers won't be turned off if you use these techniques. They will appreciate dealing with an educated consumer. *It's not rude – it's shrewd!*



## Preparedness

The attacks of September 11, 2001, and the more recent loss of life and property in Hurricanes Rita and Katrina have renewed the public's focus on the need for disaster preparedness. While the debate rages about the role of government - at all levels - in preparedness for and recovery from tragedies such as these, it's the citizens and

communities most directly affected whose role is pivotal.

Therefore, preparedness must be a part of citizens' daily lives and, as such, can be something that will improve their neighborhoods and communities in the process. Together, they can unite for a stronger community - and a stronger America. By making sure they are better prepared at home, in their schools, in their places of worships, and in their businesses and factories, citizens can do much to minimize loss of life and ensure that their community survives a natural disaster or a terrorist attack.

Natural disasters can frequently be predicted so that people have some time to prepare. But criminals and terrorists strike without warning, making it essential to have in place well-planned responses to such events.

### Tips

- Develop a communications plan for your family. Choose someone who does not live with you (preferably an out-of-town relative or friend) whom you and other family members can contact to check on each other in the event that you are separated during a disaster. Carry that person's contact information in your purse or wallet.
- Make sure children know their last name, phone number, address, and number for the out-of-town contact person.
- Make sure every member of your family knows an alternate route home.
- If family members can't get home, designate a meeting place.
- Learn how to shut off utilities such as gas, electricity, and water.
- Assemble an emergency preparedness kit that will allow your family to camp out for three days. Assume you'll be without electricity and running water.
- Store your emergency supplies in sealed containers such as plastic tubs - taped shut.
- Keep cash on hand; automated teller machines won't be working if the power is out.

- Learn CPR and first aid to help with medical emergencies.
- Learn about emergency plans for your children's school or daycare center.
- If you're a teen, find out whether your school has a group of student volunteers to help out in emergency situations. If not, offer to help start such a group. Or start a School Crime Watch.
- Learn about your company's emergency plan. Practice the plan. Learn exit routes.
- Work with your Neighborhood Watch or civic association to create a disaster preparedness plan.