

# Local Sheriff Offers Tips For Safe Shopping During the Holiday Season

Be a savvy shopper this holiday season

Avoid common problems

According to Sheriff Alan Norman "This time of year attracts more shopping-related criminal activity because of the larger crowds and the extended store hours. These factors and the usual distraction of shopping, creates a more favorable environment for petty thieves and other offenders.

The Sheriff reminds all Cleveland County residents to follow these safety tips:

**Shopping Safety:**

- A single shopper is the best target for theft. Always shop with a friend or relative.
- When going shopping, tell someone where you are going and what time to expect you to return. Also, make sure they know what you are wearing, as well as the type of vehicle you are driving.
- Shop during daylight hours. If you shop at night, park your vehicle in a well-lit area.
- Dress casually and comfortably and avoid

wearing expensive jewelry. If carrying cash, keep it in your front pocket rather than in a purse or wallet. This makes it much more difficult for a pick-pocket to remove. Also store car keys in a pants or jacket pocket. If your purse is stolen, you will still be able to drive home.

- Pay careful attention to your surroundings and avoid overloading yourself with packages. It is important to have clear visibility and freedom of motion to avoid mishaps.

- When returning to your vehicle, check around it and in the back seat. Be aware of strangers approaching you for any reason. Have your car keys in your hand to avoid spending unnecessary time unprotected from the security of your vehicle.

- If you feel uneasy returning to your vehicle alone, find a security guard and ask them to walk you to your car.

According to Sheriff Norman, "during this time of year, busy holiday shop-

pers become careless and vulnerable to other crimes as well. Credit card fraud and gift card fraud are on the rise. However, taking a few preventive measures can help."

**Credit Card Fraud:**

- Keep a close watch on your credit card every time you use it, and make sure you get it back as quickly as possible.

- Never write your PIN number on your credit card.

- Never leave your credit cards or receipts lying around.

- Shield your credit card number so that others around you can't copy it or capture it on a mobile telephone or other camera.

- Only carry credit cards that you absolutely need.

- Shred anything with your credit card number written on it.

- If you're planning to purchase online, make sure the web page where you enter your credit card information is secure through SSL (Secure Socket Layer).

You can tell if the web page is secure by looking for the gold lock or key icon at the bottom corner of your browser window.

- If you're not comfortable submitting your information through the internet, call the seller and give them your information over the telephone. Never send your credit card information via email.

- Check the company out. Only do business with companies that provide a physical address and telephone number.

- Keep good records. Always print out a copy of any online products or services you purchase.

**Gift Card Fraud:**

- Never buy gift cards from online auction sites. This is a large source of gift card fraud. Many of the gift cards are stolen, counterfeit or used.

- Only buy gift cards directly from the store issuing the gift card or from a se-

cure retailer's website.

- Don't buy gift cards off of publicly displayed racks in retail stores. Only purchase gift cards at the sales terminal from the cashier.

- Always carefully examine both the front and back of a gift card before you buy it. If you see a PIN number, ask for a different card. If the card looks like it has been tampered with in any way, put it back.

- Always ask the store cashier to scan the gift card in front of you. This will guarantee that your card is valid when you buy it and that it reflects the balance you placed on it.

- Always keep your receipt as a proof of purchase as long as there is money stored on the gift card.

- If possible, register your gift card at the store's website.

- Never give your Social Security number, date of birth or any other unneeded private information when purchasing a gift card. No reputable company will ask for this information.

With the hustle and bustle of the holiday season upon us, Attorney General Roy Cooper offers the following tips to help consumers avoid common shopping problems that come up around this time of year.

"Giving gifts to others is a huge part of holiday traditions for many families," Cooper said. "By taking time to make smart decisions you can avoid the unnecessary stress of holiday shopping mishaps."

Buy from stores you know. This will improve the odds that you'll be able to return or exchange a purchase. To check out a company's track record, call the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 1-877-5-NO-SCAM or contact your local Better Business Bureau.

Shop safely online, too. Stick to well-established companies with secure web sites (look for a lock icon on the site and a web address that starts with "https"). Get the company's street ad-

See SHOP SMART, Page 10B

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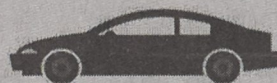
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