



# COMMUNITY LIAISON UNIT

COLUMBUS DIVISION OF POLICE • STRATEGIC RESPONSE BUREAU

## PERSONAL SAFETY

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### Safety is everyone's business!

Understandably, no one wishes to believe they might become a victim of a crime; however, denial of the problem solves nothing and may actually place you at greater risk of becoming a victim.

You must be prepared to be safe. Prevention is always better than reaction.

Learn to practice safety every single day! While things like personal alarms, tear gas, a weapon or even self defense tactics may help in a bad situation, it is important to understand they are all **reactive**, designed to be utilized when the problem is actually occurring. It is significantly more effective to prevent the problem from occurring in the first place.

#### FBI Crime Clock

The FBI publishes an annual "Crime in the United States" report. There were 16,137 murders in the United States in 2004, 350 fewer than in 2003: The FBI report also includes a "Crime Clock" that shows how frequently crimes were committed in 2004: there was one property crime in the U.S. every 3.1 seconds and one violent crime every 23.1 seconds. Here's the breakdown:

- There was one larceny / theft every 4.5 seconds
- There was one burglary every 14.7 seconds
- There was one motor vehicle theft every 25.5 seconds
- There was one aggravated assault every 36.9 seconds
- There was one robbery every 1.3 minutes
- There was one forcible rape every 5.6 minutes
- There was one murder every 32.6 minutes

Crime pervades our lives! But there are some things you can do to lessen your risk of becoming a victim. The following information, while not all-inclusive, will provide valuable suggestions in regard to making yourself and your family safer. Nothing is 100% effective. However, well learned and utilized safety tips will certainly improve your opportunity to *Live Safely!*

Most street criminals are creatures of opportunity, and in their own way, sensible. One of the keys to safety is to avoid triggering the desire to commit a crime in the first place.

### General Safety Tips

Stand tall and walk with confidence. Don't appear to be a willing target. Always be aware of what is going on around you. When walking, stick to well-lighted and busy streets. Walk with a friend(s). Avoid shortcuts through dark alleys or deserted streets.

If harassed by someone in a car, walk quickly or run in the opposite direction to safety. If you become very frightened, yell, don't scream for help. *Never* hitch-hike. Accept rides only from people you know and trust.

Don't flash your cash. Carry only the money and/or credit cards you will need for the day. Avoid carrying irreplaceable personal belongings in your purse. Ask yourself if you can accept losing the things you are carrying. *Always* have change available for an emergency telephone call.

Know your neighborhood. It seems simple, yet we often do not know what hours stores, restaurants or gas stations are open. Do you know where your neighborhood police and fire stations are located? These are places you may wish to go in case of an emergency.

If you go out for late night snacks, movies or errands, avoid going by yourself. Most assaults happen to a lone victim.

Let someone know where you are going and when you will return. **Call** if you are going to be late.

### **Getting Into Your Vehicle**

- At night, park in a well-lighted area.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Have your keys ready in hand.
- Look for anyone near your car or near you.
- Check the exterior of your car; check the interior of your car before entering.
- At home, lock doors before opening the garage to leave.
- Keep your car in working order **at all times**.
- Never let the gas tank fall below half full.

### **If Confronted Getting Out Of Your Car**

Avoid any verbal/physical confrontation. Cooperate, move quickly away from your car. Walk/run away from the immediate area, call the Police immediately! Provide the descriptions of the suspect(s) and/or vehicle(s). If at all possible, *Never* go with the suspect(s)!

### **When Driving**

Plan your route. Try not to travel alone. Keep your door locked and your windows rolled up. If you do not have air-conditioning, then at least keep the windows rolled up enough to make it difficult for someone to reach inside and take your purse, wallet or keys.

Don't drive in unfamiliar areas. Avoid "trouble" areas. Look in the rear view mirror often and watch around you – *Stay Alert!*

Always leave room ahead of your car to escape (don't box yourself in). **DO NOT** stop to help stranded drivers – call the police for them. If affordable, a cellular phone can be a valuable safety tool.

### **When Jogging or Bicycling**

Go with a friend and take familiar, well-traveled routes. Do not jog or bike at night (particularly not alone). Do not ride or run with stereo headphones. It is safer to remain alert to what is around (and behind) you.

### **Parking Lot Safety**

Use your senses – Sight, Hearing, and Smell. In most cases these are your only tools. As always, Stay Alert to your surroundings.

Park in well-lighted areas; make sure you lock your car door(s) at all times. Do not leave valuables inside your car, lock them in the trunk. Have your keys ready *In Hand* when approaching your car. Be aware of what is going on around you, people near your car or you, etc. If you are threatened, yell "Help", "Fire" or anything to draw

attention. Don't take chances! You do *Not* have to get out of your car if you do not feel safe. If unsure, drive up to the front of a store or business and summon help, then notify police.

### **Other Considerations**

Do not overload yourself with packages or bundles. Lessen the time it takes you to get into your car. Carry only the items you need in your purse and carry your purse under your coat or close to your body. Don't leave your purse lying around. Consider wearing a belt bag or "fanny pack". Record all credit card and bank information in case of theft.

If you work late or at inconvenient times for safety, call ahead and let someone know when you will be arriving and have them look out for you. Use security personnel if available to escort or watch you to your car.

You may wish to consider carrying a can of tear gas. If so, you need to train with it before you need it. Equally important, the tear gas must be in your hand (*not in the button of your purse*) when you are in a situation and/or area where you might need it.

When you are walking to your car, whether at night or during the day, try to walk with others. Again, if you are suspicious or worried, do not go out to your car at that time. If available, ask a security officer to accompany you to your car.

### **If you do become a crime victim**

Try to remain calm. Do not get into a vehicle unless there is *No Other Choice*. Get a suspect description and notify the police immediately.

Hold store meetings or safety seminars on a routine basis. Discuss problems and make suggestions. Awareness, communication and some other personal safety considerations would have to include the specific street crimes of Strong Arm Robbery, Purse Snatching and Armed Robbery.

Purse snatch, the most frequent, is usually a hit and run operation in which speed is of the essence. Most purse snatchers are fleet footed teenagers who take advantage of an opportunity. By carrying your purse under your coat or close to your body (*not dangling from your hand or arm*), you already lessen the risk. As stated previously, avoid carrying irreplaceable items and unnecessary cash or credit cards as well. Minimize the loss if you should become a victim.

A strong arm robbery or "mugging" is robbing by force or threat of force while armed robbery involves the use of a weapon, usually a knife or gun. Again, carry no more cash or credit cards than are actually needed. Be Alert!

When walking, don't give people opportunities to commit crimes. Stay away from buildings, and walk next to the street. If followed by a car, turn and walk quickly in the other direction.

Be aware of where you are and where you are going. Don't flash your cash or other valuables. Avoid traveling alone. Avoid dark places, short cuts, alleys, thick trees or bushes and sparsely traveled areas. Have your keys ready at hand.

### **If You Resist**

Understand that to resist a thief is a personal decision. However, if confronted by a weapon, consider if what you are protecting is worth the risk. But always, prevention is the key to living safer.

When discussing safety, most of us tend to think about the physical crime risks only. However, more of us are likely to become the victims of a theft crime. Including auto thefts, the residents of the City of Columbus are the victims of over 40,000 reported thefts per year. The losses are in the tens of millions of dollars! Simple logic tells you that you have a reasonable chance of becoming a victim. Yet, in many cases and with a little effort, the risk for becoming the victim of such a crime can be dramatically reduced.

## Fire Prevention and Safety

Although not a crime, fire safety affects the lives of thousands of Columbus residents every year. Fire is among the leading causes of accidental deaths in the home each year, yet many deaths or serious injuries due to fire could be avoided with a few simple considerations and/or precautions.

Smoke detectors are your early warning system. Since most fire deaths are caused by asphyxiation, and usually when people are sleeping, smoke detectors are the most effective pieces of fire fighting equipment you can have in your home. Smoke detectors should be installed outside of each separate sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms and on each additional story of the family living unit. After installation, smoke detectors should be tested *at least once a month*.

Be careful of Smoking and Ashtrays. When cleaning up after a party, put the ashtrays in the sink overnight instead of emptying them right into the trash. Make a check of couches and chairs checking for dropped cigarettes or ashes. If a cushion, chair or couch has been burned or scorched, put it outside for the night. A smoldering fire can easily result. As for smoking in bed, **do not do it**. Many people would tell you it isn't worth the risk, if they were still here!

When used correctly, fire extinguishers can keep small fires from becoming large ones. However, always notify your fire department immediately! There are 3 types of fire extinguisher. "A" type for ordinary combustibles, "B" type for flammable liquids and "C" type for electrical fires. There is also a multipurpose dry chemical extinguisher labeled A-B-C that is effective in putting out most types of fires. Check with your fire department for further information.

Never store flammable liquids in the home near water heaters, the furnace or any other device with a spark or flame. Store gasoline and other combustibles in tight metal containers designed for storing flammable liquids. Throughout the home, make sure all tools and appliances have a testing agency label (UL or FM). Frayed or worn cords and plugs should be replaced. Never plug more appliances into a socket than it is designed to accommodate safely.

Teach and practice fire safety techniques and escape plans so they become "second nature", especially with children. The key is to *prevent*, not put out fires!! If you have any questions, or concerns, please feel free to contact us!