

The National Crime Prevention Council says travel safety has taken on a new meaning during these tough economic times. The organization best known for its icon, McGruff the Crime Dog, says opportunistic thieves may be looking for unprotected homes or pre-occupied travelers during the Thanksgiving holiday. NCPC suggests following these safety tips to avoid problems during the start of the busiest travel season of the year.

Safety begins at home

- Make sure your house looks "lived-in" when you are away. Lock all doors and windows, and set household lights (inside and out) on timers.
- Trim your hedges and bushes so thieves do not have a place to hide out.
- Have a neighbor park a car in your driveway to make it appear as if someone is home.
- Invest in an alarm. An alarm system controls access points to your home and lets you know if someone has invaded your space.
- Ask a trusted neighbor or friend to watch your house and pick up your mail and newspapers while you are away.
- File a "travel plan." Let someone know where you are going, the route you plan to take, and when you plan to arrive. If you deviate from that plan, let someone know.

Watch out for clever criminals

- Do not stop if your car is bumped from behind or if someone says there is something wrong with your car. Go to a service station or a well-lit, populated area and call for help.
- Fill the gas tank before dark and lock your car doors, and roll up your windows if you step away from the car for any reason.
- Never leave items of value such as cell phones, cameras, jewelry, or other expensive belongings visible in your car. Lock them in your trunk or take them with you.

Safety away from home

- Carry money separately from credit cards. Carry your purse close to your body or your wallet inside a coat or front trouser pocket.
- If you choose to shop on Black Friday, do not overburden yourself with packages to avoid being an easy target.
- Stick to well-lighted and well-traveled streets at all times.
- Select ATM machines in visible, well-lighted locations.
- Do not leave valuables in your hotel room. Most hotels have safes for guest use.
- Keep your hotel room door locked, even when you are inside.