

Staying Safe at Christmas and New Year

Burglaries

Criminals are aware that during December, people's homes contain a large number of valuable Christmas presents and therefore it is more profitable to break in at this time.

Try to leave lights on in the house when out in the evenings, preferably on a smart or manual timer. Don't leave presents on show and visible from your front windows. After the excitement of opening your presents on Christmas Day has passed, be mindful when you dispose of your present boxes. By leaving the empty boxes on display by your bins, this advertises to burglars the new goods within your home that are worth stealing. It may be worth disposing of those boxes at your local recycling centre. Don't forget to shut windows when you are out and make sure doors are properly locked when you leave and go to bed.

Theft from cars

Do not leave your Christmas shopping on display within your car as you are advertising to the thieves that your car is worth breaking into. If your arms are aching from all of the shopping and you want to put it in your car before you start more shopping, place the items in your boot, not on display. Consider re-parking your car, even within the same car park, in case thieves are watching shoppers dropping off presents. By re-parking, they will assume you have finished and driven off with your purchases.

Theft of vehicles

Make sure your car is locked and additional security devices used as a deterrent when parked. Don't leave your vehicle unattended with the engine running when de-icing your vehicle. It only takes a moment to get in and drive away.

Pickpockets

Be wary at large gatherings, such as Christmas markets or even shopping centres and keep an eye on your possessions. The build-up to Christmas is a good time for pickpockets as their targets can be distracted by shopping, their arms are full of bags and may not be paying attention to their purses or wallets. Where possible, place your purse or wallet in a zipped or buttoned pocket, which makes it harder for a pickpocket to steal. You could also make use of a purse chain, which attaches your purse to your bag or coat. If the purse is grabbed, it can only be taken a short distance before it reaches the end of the chain's length. This will alert you to the attempted theft.

Cybercrime & Frauds

Christmas is a time when criminals bombard innocent victims with numerous scam emails, telephone calls or text messages. There are so many different scams, it would be impossible to list them all, so here are the main tips as to how to spot them and what to do -

1. Don't part with money or your bank details to a cold caller.
2. Don't click on links within emails / text messages, especially when they state you owe money or "your last payment did not go through". That link will either take you to a fake page or install a virus.
3. Some frauds come from countries where English isn't their first language so check for spelling mistakes or bad grammar.
4. Have you been addressed by your actual name or by your email address (e.g. Dear smithy125@email.com), the latter will likely be a scam.
5. If you are unsure if the email / text / call is genuine, then speak to the company directly and they will confirm if the call/text is genuine. Remember to obtain a number for the company yourself, do not use one provided within the email or text.

Nights Out

Christmas is normally a time for parties at nightclubs and pubs, so whilst having fun, be wary of opportunist thieves who will prey on people who have had a drink, in order to steal their valuables if they are left unattended.

Drink Spiking

There has been an increase in reported offences of drink spiking, whereby the victims have alcohol or drugs unknowingly added to their drinks. The purpose of this is for the suspect to either steal from or sexually assault the victim. According to the NHS, the symptoms of having your drink spiked are:

- Lowered inhibitions
- Difficulty concentrating or speaking
- Loss of balance and finding it hard to move
- Visual problems, particularly blurred vision
- Memory loss or 'blackouts'
- Feeling confused or disorientated, particularly after waking up
- Paranoia
- Hallucinations or having an 'out of body' experience
- Nausea and vomiting
- Unconsciousness

Ways to prevent your drink being spiked:

- Go to the bar with a friend or group of friends
- Cover your drink
- Don't accept drinks from strangers
- Never leave your drink unattended
- Watch out for changes to your drink
- Don't drink from other people's glasses

What to do if you or a friend are victims of spiking:

- Do not leave the victim alone or let them go home alone or with a stranger
- Tell a member of bar staff or the manager immediately
- Telephone the Police
- Keep the victim talking
- If the victim's condition deteriorates, seek medical help or call an ambulance

Drink & Drug Driving

There is never an excuse for drink or drug driving, you put your life and that of your passengers and other road users in danger. If you are found to be drink / drug driving by the Police, you will be arrested and prosecuted, leading to an automatic disqualification from driving and a fine.

How to report possible offences, concerns or to give information?

If you are a victim of or have any information about any of the above offences, please report via one of the below methods -

Essex Police via 999 for emergencies and offences that are "In Progress",
101 or online at [Report a crime | Essex Police](#)
CrimeStoppers in order to give information anonymously — 0800 555 111

Please remember all calls and information are triaged to make the best use of Police resources available and may not justify an immediate response.