



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Howard County police preparing for safe holiday season *Increased patrols aimed at crime prevention*

As the holiday shopping season begins, Howard County police are increasing the police presence at local businesses. Officers will be patrolling in cars, on foot and on bicycles, both in uniform and in plainclothes, from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day.

The increased police presence aims to deter robberies, shoplifting, theft and associated crimes. Officers will also focus on parking violations, including fire lane parking violations and improper use of handicapped parking.

This holiday season, police will be aggressively enforcing traffic laws with attention to impaired driving, speeding and violations of seat belt and child safety seat laws. To combat holiday drinking and driving, police will be conducting numerous DUI saturation patrols throughout the next month. Police will also be paying special attention to underage drinking, which increases during the holidays when students are on winter break.

County residents are advised to be more careful, prepared and alert during the holiday season. McGruff the Crime Dog who will be visiting local shopping centers to share crime prevention messages, including the following tips.

- When shopping, travel with a group or in pairs, and schedule shopping trips during the day.
- Stay alert, especially when carrying packages or walking on a parking lot or in a garage.
- Avoid carrying too many packages, and leave one hand free to access keys or a phone quickly.
- Park in a well-lighted parking space, and select an area where there are other cars and foot traffic.
- Don't leave cell phones, purses or other valuables in a parked car – especially in plain view.
- When loading packages into the car, use the trunk instead of the back seat, or make an extra trip home in between shopping trips to unload packages.
- Beware of strangers approaching you unsolicited. If you feel uncomfortable, walk in another direction. If possible, walk back toward the store or toward another person.
- Shop only with reputable online retailers that offer secure transactions.
- If you are expecting a delivery, ask a neighbor to bring the packages inside if you will not be home.
- When the holidays are over, don't put boxes for electronics or valuables in plain view on recycling day. Collapse boxes, and put them in your recycling cart or bind them with rope or tape to prevent becoming a victim of a break in.

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Editor's Note: Photo and video opportunities of McGruff the Crime Dog are available. Please call 410-313-2236 to arrange to cover one of McGruff's visits to area shopping centers.