



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

For Release: Nov. 23, 2016

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Police aim for safe holiday season; encourage safe driving, shopping and prevention of package thefts

Howard County Police are increasing their presence in shopping areas, neighborhoods and on roadways to ensure residents stay safe this holiday season. Officers will be increasing patrols in cars, on foot and on bicycles, both in uniform and in plainclothes, from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day.

The increased police presence aims to deter robberies, shoplifting, theft, and associated crimes at malls and shopping centers. Beginning this weekend, police will have an increased number of patrol cars on the roads looking for impaired drivers.

"We want people to celebrate safely over the Thanksgiving weekend and throughout the holiday season," said Police Chief Gary Gardner. "Make sure to always designate a sober driver. We don't want to see this joyous time of year turn tragic for any family."

Throughout the season, officers will be working to keep people safe on the roads. They will be focused on enforcing traffic laws, with attention to drunken and drugged driving, speeding, parking violations and seat belt and child safety seat laws. There will also be an emphasis on enforcing underage drinking laws.

SAFE SHOPPING: As Black Friday approaches, shoppers are reminded to be careful, prepared and alert, especially during the holiday season. McGruff the Crime Dog will be visiting local shopping centers through December to share crime prevention messages, such as 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-lit 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.
- Beware of strangers approaching you unsolicited. If you feel uncomfortable, walk in another direction.
- When the holidays are over, don't put boxes for electronics or valuables in plain view on recycling day.

PREVENTING PACKAGE THEFTS: Police are also focused on preventing package thefts as deliveries of online purchases increase this time of year. While there have been no reports yet this season, the department is asking residents to review their holiday purchases and shipments to determine if any packages are missing. If so, report the incident to police at 410-313-2200. To prevent thefts, police encourage residents to follow these tips:

- Track shipments and try to be home when they are scheduled to arrive. If you won't be home, have the shipment delivered to your work if permitted or ask the delivery company to leave the package in a discreet location.
- Ask a neighbor to take the package inside until you get home.
- Be aware of suspicious people and vehicles. If you notice suspicious behavior, call 911 immediately. Make note of any vehicle's make, model, tag number and direction of travel.

The police department is working to help ensure a safe, happy holiday season for all who live, visit and work in the county. Please be smart and safe this holiday season!

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