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Alabama Department of Public Safety

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Law Enforcement Urges Caution, Vigilance Among Holiday Shoppers

MONTGOMERY — The holiday season is upon us, and the Department of Public Safety and its law enforcement partners throughout the state urge holiday shoppers to exercise vigilance and caution during the busy shopping season. Reports of shoppers being robbed or otherwise victimized are commonplace during the season, according to the Alabama Fusion Center.

The Fusion Center is co-chaired by the Alabama Department of Homeland Security and Public Safety. It operates within Public Safety's ABI Division and is staffed with members from local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. The center receives and disseminates data aimed at combating terrorism and crime, and is supported by grant funding from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Crime tends to go up this time of year, and it is important to be especially cautious and alert when out in busy shopping venues, said DPS Director Col. J. Christopher Murphy. "Holiday shoppers often are rushed or stressed and may easily lose focus on what's going on around them," said Murphy. "This is exactly what a would-be robber looks for: someone who appears inattentive and distracted, an easy target."

Following are pointers provided to the Alabama Fusion Center by the Montgomery Police Department. DHS and DPS said observing these practices can significantly reduce one's chances of becoming a crime victim during the busy holiday season.

- Use debit or credit cards if possible, or carry only enough money to pay for your errands. If carrying large amounts of money, separate the money into amounts needed and place them in different pockets.
- Be extremely careful using ATM machines. Use them in populated places and constantly pay attention to what is going on around you.
- If you have to carry a purse, carry it close to your body and always zipped.
- Park as close as possible to the mall or shopping center.
- Park in a well-lit location.
- Have your keys ready to open your vehicle before you exit the mall or shopping center.

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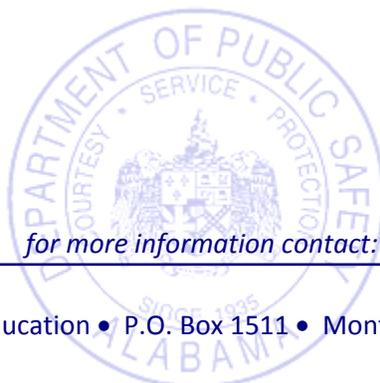
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- Remember exactly where you parked your vehicle.
- Avoid shopping until you are exhausted. You are more alert when you are less tired.
- When hurried or in a crowded shop, make sure you get all forms of identification and credit cards returned to you before leaving.
- Use an escort or mall security if you have too many packages or if you are leaving the mall after closing.
- Keep gifts or packages out of plain view inside your vehicle.
- Keep gifts hidden from view through outside windows of your residence.
- After opening gifts, break down the boxes of expensive electronics and high-end stores and put them in plastic bags to hide the fact you have valuable items in your home.
- Carry a cellular phone and have emergency phone numbers available.

Murphy said the Alabama Fusion Center works to further and facilitate the exchange of data among all levels of law enforcement. The AFC focuses on information that is particularly relevant to the day-to-day work of law enforcement officers, in addition to defining and tracking broader trends.

In addition to DHS and DPS, the center's steering committee includes the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; U.S. Attorney, Northern District; U.S. Attorney, Middle District; U.S. Attorney, Southern District; Federal Bureau of Investigation, Birmingham; Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mobile; the Adjutant General; the Attorney General; Department of Agriculture and Industries; Department of Public Health; Alabama Emergency Management Agency; Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center; Alabama Sheriffs' Association; and Alabama Association of Chiefs of Police.

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