

Stop the Grinch from Getting Your Goods!

■ By Caryn Suarez

Judy White and her husband came home from work, around this time last year, to find their front door open and their apartment completely ransacked. "My mother had just passed away a few months earlier in May and we had already talked about this being the first Christmas that she would not be here. We both came home after a hard day at work to find out we had been robbed! All of the TV's, VCR's, electronic equipment, all of the Christmas presents that I had bought, all of my jewelry both the costume and my heirloom rings from my grandmother and great grandmother. Everything gone in an instant. Three months later all that was recovered to us was one of my grandmother's rings." Judy went on to state that after that event they moved from their apartment to the Westside of Jacksonville, but still to this day Judy feels the pain of her loss of her family heirlooms. "I walk around my house now and I never feel totally secure. If something is out of place, I feel like somebody has been in here and moved it. Every little noise in the night makes me sit up in bed and wonder what it is. I don't think that I will ever get over the feeling or anger I feel towards the people that violated my home, especially with the loss of family heirlooms that can never be replaced."

Unfortunately, it is that season again now. The rate for home burglaries goes up every year between now and New Year's. Here's a few Christmas Safety Do's and Don'ts to remember this year. Don't be the bad guy's "free mall". Being aware and using some common sense can help keep your home a safe one during the holidays. Don't forget to put these on your lists of "things to do."



BE SMART DO'S:

1. **DO** check your locks and make sure they are all secure. Check dead bolts; install them if you do not have them. If you have an alarm system check to make sure that it is completely working. This includes smoke detectors!
2. If you have a sliding glass door, **DO** put a broomstick or board in the part of the door that slides back. This should keep prowlers from trying to pry it open and slide it back.
3. **DO** get some timers for your TV's or lights in the house if you are not going to be at home over the holidays, or get someone to come over, get your mail, come in for a few minutes a day, turn on some lights, etc.
4. If going out of town, **DO** stop your mail or paper or make arrangements for someone to pick them up while you are away.
5. **DO** have a Neighborhood Watch meeting on your street. Talk about who is going away, when and volunteer to keep a look out for your neighbors while they are away.
6. **DO** crush boxes in your Christmas trash that may be advertising to criminals that you just got a new DVD player, stereo, camera, etc. Nothing appeals to them more then the "after Christmas bargains" when they can break into your home looking to take your new gifts!
7. **DO** have your neighbors or friends park a car in your driveway every now and then if you will not be at home to make it look like someone is there.
8. **DO** lock your house and set your alarm if you have them when you leave! Even if you are going to only run to the store for 15 minutes, don't leave the alarm off and the chance for somebody to rob you! It only takes a good thief 10 minutes or less!
9. **DO** go Christmas shopping in pairs if possible and ALWAYS go to your car with your keys in your hands and not worrying or fumbling with packages. If you have to make a couple trips back and forth to the car, store bags in your trunk. Do not leave them out in the car where thieves can "window shop."
10. If you are shopping alone or at night time, **DO** get security from the store to walk you to your car if it is not in a close enough, well lighted area.

A FEW DON'TS:

1. **DON'T** put your Christmas presents under the tree before Christmas if possible. You may lose all of them to "Grinch Shopping". Santa waits until Christmas Eve, try it with the rest of your gifts as well! Decorate under the tree with a nativity scene, train, fake presents or poinsettias for a just as beautiful effect.
2. **DON'T** store your gifts all in one spot of the house like one certain closet, bedroom or place. Spread them around. Thieves are going to want to grab and run most of the time, so in the event of a home robbery, losing some presents is better than losing all! Try to store them in big boxes or trash bags to disguise them a little bit.
3. **DON'T** display your gifts in their boxes under the tree after Christmas. Put gifts away soon after on Christmas Day. Thieves are definitely looking for those "after Christmas Sales" also; only you will pay the price, especially if you leave all the merchandise out on display.
4. **DON'T** put your beautiful Christmas tree in the front window revealing all the presents around it for all to see. This again is just asking for it!
5. **DON'T** go off and leave your inside Christmas lights on, candles burning or that great smelling potpourri pot on. Christmas is the worst time for fires!
6. **DON'T** forget when shopping to stay aware of all around you at all times! Lock your doors also immediately when getting in your car. Be sure to look under your car walking up to it and in the backseat before getting into your car.

BE SMART and don't let the Grinch spoil your holiday time! We can beat them at their own game just by being aware and using a little common sense. Oh, and one more thing ... **DO** have a great Holiday Season!!!

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