



**WINTER HAVEN**  
*The Chain of Lakes City*  
**POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
Gary W. Hester, Chief of Police

Date: Nov. 22, 2011

Time: 4 P.M.

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WINTER HAVEN – Winter Haven Police are encouraging residents to be prevention minded as we go into the holiday season with shopping, activities and events that could make us vulnerable while our guard is down during the festivities.

Home: Be sure to keep doors and windows locked when at home and away. Check on alarms and outdoor lighting to be sure all are in good working order. It is not recommended to have a Christmas tree in the window, though this is a favorite spot for many with the holiday décor. Having a tree in the front window allows the opportunity for thieves to attempt access through the window and grab any gifts very quickly. For those who choose to keep their tree front and center, don't put gifts under the tree. Even fake gifts for decoration will only give the appearance gifts are there and the damage to your home and breach of security will certainly damper your holiday.

Mail: Follow common-sense practices when utilizing your mailbox for outgoing mail. Only put mail in the box to be picked up a short time before the regular route is scheduled. If the time varies and you are uncertain, take your mail to a post office. A raised flag lets everyone know there is mail in the box. Be sure to watch out for unusual activity around mailboxes in your neighborhood. The time is ripe for criminals to go through mailboxes searching for holiday cards that could contain gift cards or cash. This is also a method to access account information from checks or statements. A locked mailbox or Post Office box is the most secure way to assure your mail doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

Internet: Social networking is a popular way to pass along information to your friends. During the holiday season, it becomes even more popular to let your "friends" know about holiday parties and activities away from home. You can never be sure who sees these posts, so it's recommended to not advertise when you are leaving for

festivities. Your friends could be perfectly harmless, but others who see posts could be made aware of a prime opportunity to make you a victim while you are away.

Shopping: We should always be aware of our surroundings while out in public, but during the holiday season, more activity in public places could mean more opportunity to become a victim, especially in crowded parking lots. Always park in well-lit areas, especially if you anticipate being inside when it gets dark. Keep your vehicle locked at all times, even when sitting inside before exiting or just after entering the vehicle. Always keep packages in your trunk and secure all items, including a GPS and phone, so they are not in plain view. When walking to your car, keep your keys in your hand with a finger on the panic button, in case something warrants an emergency. If you feel threatened by anyone, don't be afraid to press the button to warn others that you could be in danger. If you approach your vehicle and you see anything suspicious, don't unlock your vehicle – turn around and call police. If your vehicle has been compromised, officers need to know immediately in order to begin the attempt to locate any suspect.

Banking and ATM: Always be aware of anyone in the area of an ATM when you approach. Go with your instincts. If you are uncomfortable with someone around an ATM, leave the area to another location. Never carry your PIN numbers with your bank cards. It's always a good idea to make copies, front and back, of all credit cards and bank cards. Keep the copies at home and in the unfortunate event you lose them or are a victim of crime, all the information needed for the bank is on the copies.

The men and women of the Winter Haven Police Department are dedicated to your safety every day of the year. Each citizen can take steps to limit the opportunity to become a victim of crime by following these common sense precautions.

We wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season.