

Tips for Staying Safe During the Winter

Although it's difficult to imagine anyone deliberately spending any more time out in the frigid weather than is absolutely necessary, some would-be criminals see winter as the perfect time to take advantage of weaknesses in home- and personal-security habits.

Here are three tips for keeping your home, your belongings, and your self safe when temperatures are low.

1. Keep your home safe while you're out.

Just as newspapers or mail piling up on your porch can be signs that nobody's home, a pristine, smooth, snow-covered driveway and front walk deliver the same message. If you go on vacation or spend part of your winter in warmer climates, make sure somebody is shoveling your walk for you while you're away.

Dark windows are also more noticeable during the winter. With sunlight lasting almost until bedtime in the summer, it's difficult for thieves to tell if your interior lights are on, but a dark house in the winter tells passersby that nobody is home. It's a good idea to invest in a few timers for your lamps to make it look like your house is occupied, even when it's not.

2. Keep your car safe while you're warming it up.

As tempting as it is to start the car and let it warm up while you finish getting ready inside, it's not a good idea, unless you can lock the car doors while the car is unattended.

You may think you'll only be away from the car for a moment, but that's all it takes, especially since thieves know this is a common practice on cold, winter days. A thief who is aware of your routine, or one who is simply out looking for running cars, needs only a few seconds to check the door handle to see if the car is locked, and a few minutes more to simply climb in and drive off.

3. Keep yourself safe while walking to your car.

How many times have you wrapped your face in a scarf or pulled your hood over your head and hurried out to your car, effectively wearing blinders and oblivious to your surroundings? It's understandable; when the wind is biting our noses, we don't want to stop and look around – we want to reach shelter as quickly as possible.

In the bright sunlight of summer, more people tend to be outside, and visibility is high making it inconvenient for criminals to stalk, confront, or hide from potential marks. On the other hand, winter weather naturally results in less awareness of our surroundings, and we tend to find ourselves more alone and vulnerable without even realizing it.

So be prepared before stepping outside. Establish a buddy system and make sure you have a companion within earshot as you traverse dark parking lots.

If you must go out alone, keep your key ring in your hand; most car key fobs today have an alarm button for emergencies, and sharp keys between your fingers can be an effective makeshift weapon if necessary. You can also download cell phone apps that automatically dial 911 and forward your GPS coordinates to the police with the push of a button.

It's also a good idea to carry a pocket lock de-icer so you don't get stranded in a dark parking lot with a frozen lock.

Although crime isn't solely a winter-weather activity, cold temperatures and decreased daylight can result in increased vulnerabilities, creating more opportunities for dishonest people to get away with nefarious activities. Fortunately, adapting a few habits can go a long way toward keeping your home, your belongings, and your self safe from winter predators.

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