

November 26, 2007

## Virginia State Police offers Holiday Shopping and Driving Tips

At the same time you're making your holiday list and checking it twice, thieves and fraudsters are putting together a different kind of list. Avoid falling victim to these criminals by being observant and taking a few extra precautions while enjoying the season's festivities.

The Virginia State Police (VSP) Insurance Fraud (IFP) and Help Eliminate Auto Theft (H.E.A.T.) programs want to make sure the commonwealth's citizens stay safe and offer the following safety tips to protect you and your family from the grinchers who want to steal more than your holiday.

1. Always lock your car and take your keys with you. Don't leave your car unlocked and running even if you think you're only going to be a few minutes. It only takes a thief 12 seconds to steal a car.
2. Park your vehicle in a well-lighted area; and always lock it, make sure the windows are up and take the keys. Don't make your car an easy target for thieves. Twenty percent of the vehicles stolen have the keys left in them.
3. Don't leave any packages or valuables in your car in plain view. Always lock them in your trunk or cover them so they are not readily visible. Thieves know there are more packages in cars this time of year and are on the lookout for them.
4. Always approach your car with keys in hand and check the back seat of your car. If you see suspicious activity or someone is loitering near your car, don't approach it, and if possible, notify the police.
5. Be wary of people who offer you the right-of-way out of a parking space or indicate that it's okay to proceed. Scammers will motion to you that it's okay to pull out of a parking space, only to have their accomplice run into you with their vehicle, which may lead to your insurance company having to foot the bill for vehicle repair and possible bogus bodily injury claims.
6. When driving, don't follow too close. You may be setting yourself up to be the victim of a staged crash if the vehicle in front of you stops suddenly.
7. If you are in a vehicle crash, be wary of individuals who don't want to notify the police or get a police report. Also make note of the number, ages, sex and race of the occupants of the other vehicle along with the license plate number. It's helpful to carry a disposable camera in your car to document the vehicles' damage as well as the occupants.
8. Be mindful of people who approach your vehicle to ask for directions or change, or to hand out flyers.
9. Winter cold can be stressful on your vehicle. Avoid being stranded by making sure your vehicle's maintenance is up-to-date and your gas doesn't fall below a quarter of a tank.
10. Carry a cellular phone and know your emergency numbers: #77 for Virginia State Police and 911 for local police.

If you have knowledge of a fraudulent insurance scheme or suspect you may have been the victim of insurance fraud, report the activity to IFP on the insurance fraud hotline at 1-877-62FRAUD (1-877-623-7283) or visit [www.StampOutFraud.com](http://www.StampOutFraud.com). You may also be eligible to receive a reward of up to \$25,000.

The H.E.A.T. Program also offers a reward of up to \$25,000 for information that leads to an arrest for vehicle theft. Call 1-800-947-HEAT (1-800-947-4328) or go to [www.HeatReward.com](http://www.HeatReward.com) if you have information about auto theft.