Crime Prevention Tips

Home security and personal security tips for citizens

Tips for senior citizens to combat fraudulent activity

Fayette County Sheriff’s Office
Barry H. Babb, Sheriff
www.fayettesheriff.org
A. **Know your locks:** Did you know that in almost half of the residential burglaries, the thief simply enters the residence through an unlocked door or unsecured window?

Make sure every external door has a sturdy, well-installed dead bolt lock. Key-in-knob locks alone are not enough.

Sliding glass doors can offer easy access if they are not properly secured. You can secure them by installing commercially available locks or putting a broomstick or dowel in the inside track to jam the door. To prevent the door being lifted off the track, drill a hole through the sliding door frame and the fixed frame. Then insert a pin in the hole.

Lock double-hung windows with key locks or "pin" windows by drilling a small hole into a 45 degree angle between the inner and outer frames, then insert a nail that can be removed. Secure basement windows with grills or grates. Always remember fire safety precautions.

Instead of hiding keys around the outside of your home, give an extra key to a neighbor you trust. Or purchase and install an outside “lock-box”.

When you move into a new house or apartment, re-key the locks.

B. **Know your doors:** A lock on a flimsy door is about as effective as locking your car door but leaving the window down.

All outside doors should be all medal or solid wood.

If your doors don’t fit tightly in their frames, install weather stripping around them.

Install a peephole or wide-angle viewer in all entry doors so you can see who is outside.

C. **Check the outside:** Look at your house from the outside. Make sure you know the following tips:

Thieves hate bright lights. Install outside lights and keep them on at night or have them on a motion detector.

Keep your yard clean. Prune back shrubbery so it doesn’t hide doors or windows. Cut back tree limbs that a thief could use to climb to an upper-level window.
Clearly display your house numbers so police and other emergency vehicles can find your home quickly.

If you travel, create the illusion that you are home by getting some timers that will turn lights on and off in the different areas of your house throughout the evening. Lights burning 24 hours a day signal an empty house.

Leave shades, blinds, and curtains in normal positions.

Don’t let your mail or newspapers pile up! Call the post office and/or your paper carrier to stop delivery or have a trusted neighbor pick it up.

Make a list of your valuables - VCRs, stereos, computers, jewelry. Take photos of the items, list their serial numbers and descriptions. Keep this list and photos in a secure location.

If all of these steps are taken, the chances of your becoming a victim are greatly reduced. An additional preventive step you may want to consider is an alarm. Alarms can be a good investment, especially if you have many valuables in your home, or live in an isolated area or an area with a history of break-ins. Consider the following tips:

Check with several companies before you buy so you can decide what level of security fits your needs. Do business with an established company and check references before signing a contract.

Learn how to use your system properly! Don’t "cry wolf" by setting off false alarms. People will stop paying attention.

You should also consider starting a Neighborhood Watch in your neighborhood.

If you have further questions concerning home security, contact Major Tommy Pope at 770-716-4751 or tpope@fayetterecountyga.gov.

While out and about...

- Go with friends and family, not alone.
- Carry your purse close to your body, not dangling by the straps. Put a wallet in an inside coat or front pants pocket.
- Don’t carry credit cards you don’t need or large amounts of cash.
- Use direct deposit for social security and other regular checks.
- If someone or something makes you uneasy, trust your instincts and leave.
In your car…

- Whether you're a passenger or driver, keep your car doors locked. Be particularly alert in parking lots and garages. If possible, park in a well lighted area near an entrance.
- Always keep your car doors locked, whether you are in or out of your car.
- Travel well-lit and busy streets. Plan your route.
- Don't leave your purse, or any valuables, on the seat beside you; put them on the floor, preferably out of sight, where it is more difficult for someone to see them and be tempted to steal them. Better yet, lock packages or bags in the trunk. If interesting packages are out of sight, a thief will be less tempted to break in to steal them.
- When returning to your car, check the front seat, back seat, and floor before entering.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- If your car should break down, get far enough off the road, turn on your emergency flashers, raise the hood, get back into the car, lock the door, and wait for help. If you have a cell phone, call for help.

In your home....

- Install good locks on doors and windows. Use them! Do not hide keys in mailboxes and planters or under doormats. Instead, leave an extra set of keys with a trusted neighbor or friend. Or purchase and install an outside “lock-box”.
- Lock your doors and windows. Keep your garage doors locked.
- Never open your door automatically. Use an optical viewer (peep hole).
- If someone knocks on your door, acknowledge them from inside without opening the locked door. Ask them their business. If you do not recognize them and are suspicious about them, dial 911 and report the suspicious activity. Tell the subject(s) you are calling the police. If you do not acknowledge the knocking on the door and the subject(s) intend on breaking in, they may be more apt to break in if they believe no one is home.
- Ask for photo identification from service or delivery people before letting them in. If you are the least bit worried call the company to verify.
- Be sure your street address number is large, clear of obstruction, and well-lighted so police and other emergency personnel can find your home quickly.
- Consider a home alarm system that provides emergency monitoring for burglary, fire, and medical emergencies.
- At night, draw your blinds or draperies,
- Vary your daily routine.
- Use "Neighborhood Watch" to keep an eye on your neighborhood. A concerned neighbor is often the best protection against crime because suspicious persons and activities are noticed and reported to police promptly.
- Don't leave notes on the door when going out.
- Leave lights on when going out at night; use a timer to turn lights on and off when you are away for an extended period.
- Notify neighbors and the police when going away on a trip. Cancel deliveries such as newspapers and arrange for someone to mow the lawn if need be. Arrange for your mail to be held by the Post Office, or ask a neighbor to collect it for you.
- Be wary of unsolicited offers to make repairs to your home. Deal only with reputable businesses.
- Keep an inventory with serial numbers and photographs of resalable appliances, antiques and furniture. Leave copies in a safe place such as a safe deposit box or a home safe.

**Watch out for con artists!**

- Do not fall for anything that sounds too good to be true - a free vacation, sweepstakes prizes, cures for cancer and arthritis, a low-risk high-yield investment scheme.
- Never give your credit card, Social Security, or bank account number to anyone over the phone. It’s illegal for telemarketers to ask for these numbers to verify a prize or a gift.
- Do not let anyone rush you into signing anything - an insurance policy, a sales agreement, a contract of any kind. Read it carefully and have someone you trust check it over.
- Beware of individuals claiming to represent companies, consumer organizations, or government agencies that offer to recover lost money from fraudulent telemarketers for a fee.
- If you’re suspicious, check it out with police, the Better Business Bureau, or local consumer protection office. Call the National Consumers League Fraud Information Center at **1-800-876-7060**.

**Getting involved with community programs, such as Neighborhood Watch, would help you take an active part in the safety of your community. If your neighborhood does not have a Neighborhood Watch Program, contact your local police or sheriff’s office.**

**Work to change conditions that hurt your neighborhood. If we are going to keep crime in check, we are going to have to work together. It takes everyone in the community, both young and old, to keep our community a safe place we can be proud to live in.**
Senior Citizens Are Frequent Targets of Fraudulent Telemarketers

They need help because:

- **IT IS HARD TO TELL IF A CALLER IS LEGITIMATE.** Good salespeople are convincing and so are crooks.
- **IT IS HARD TO HANG UP.** Many people feel that it’s impolite to hang up on callers. And swindlers know how to take control of the conversations, either by pretending to be very friendly or by using bullying tactics.
- **SENIOR CITIZENS ARE TARGETED RELENTLESSLY.** Some older people get more than 20 calls a day from scam artists - - the same ones trying to wear them down or ones who know they’ve been victimized before and think they’re vulnerable.
- **SENIORS TEND TO TRUST THE CALLER.** Targets of fraud often don’t realize that the person on the phone could be a crook. They give people the benefit of the doubt.
- **WE ALL WANT TO BELIEVE.** Who doesn’t want to win a valuable prize or strike it rich on an investment? People want to believe that it’s their lucky day, and may react with anger or suspicion when friends or family question their optimism.

It’s hard to hang up on people - - especially when the caller sounds so polite and friendly. But people wouldn’t let strangers into their homes or accept rides from someone they didn’t know. So, they should handle telephone calls from strangers the same way.

Senior Citizens Who Are Targets of Fraud Need to Know That:

- Illegal telemarketing is a crime, and that fraudulent telemarketers are criminals;
- the FBI reports that there are an estimated 14,000 illegal telemarketing operations bilking consumers every day;
- you can’t tell by the tone of someone’s voice if the caller is legitimate;
- legitimate companies don’t pressure people into sending money immediately;
- it’s illegal for contests or sweepstakes to require payment to enter or claim a prize;
- legitimate marketers are willing to send written information about the products or services they’re selling;
- giving money to a fraudulent telemarketer usually means losing it forever;
- reporting suspected telemarketing crime is essential to stop it;
AND THEY NEED TO KNOW they can protect themselves from being targets of fraud by:

- telling the caller that they want to check it out and asking for a number to call back. If the caller refuses to give the number or insists on an immediate decision, it’s a “red flag of fraud.”
- calling the National Consumer’s League’s National Fraud Information Center at (800) 876-7060.

WARNING SIGNS THAT A SENIOR CITIZEN MAY BE A TARGET OF FRAUD

If an older person is:

- receiving lots of junk mail for contests, “free” trips, prizes and sweepstakes,
- getting frequent calls from strangers offering valuable awards or great money making opportunities, or asking for charitable contribution,
- making repeated and/or large payments to out-of-state companies,
- having payments picked up by private courier services,
- receiving lots of cheap items such as costume jewelry, small appliances, pens, and pencils, beauty products, water filters, etc. (often purchased in order to win supposedly valuable prizes, or these were the prizes that they received),
- getting calls from organizations offering to recover money that they have paid to telemarketers, for a fee, then, he or she may be a target of fraud.

Sometimes it's not easy to convince people that telemarketers offering big prizes or no-risk, high yield investment opportunities may be crooks.