



AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

21 ACADIA STREET • AMHERST, NOVA SCOTIA • B4H 4W3 • (902) 667-7227 • FAX: (902) 667-0268

With the Christmas season upon us, it is important to remember to stay safe over the holidays. Financial pressures due the holiday season can sometimes lead to an increase in crime around this time. Below are some tips that the Amherst Police Department recommends:

Shopping

Before giving out your credit card information, research any websites that you wish to do online purchases with. Never go to a website through an email link as the link may redirect you to a phony web page. Review the company's better business bureau rating to see if any complaints have been made towards the company.

When making purchases in person, make sure that your debit/credit card remains in sight at all times. Dishonest employees could attempt to swipe personal info off these cards if given the opportunity. Purses should always be kept close to the body and never left in shopping carts. Shoppers should not leave gifts in their vehicles. If parcels must be left in a vehicle, use the trunk which keeps them out of plain view. Larger and more expensive purchases should be bought last so that they are immediately brought home after a shopping excursion. When shopping at malls, educate your child to never leave the store with anyone and have a safety plan in effect if you become separated. If a child is lost they should be instructed to go to the nearest cash register and inform the clerk.

On the Road

Increased traffic during the holidays means that parents should be extra vigilant with their young ones. Children may dart off quickly in crowds or run behind cars in parking lots. They should never be left unattended in a vehicle even if it is just for a minute. Police will contact Children and Family Services when we become aware of a situation where parents/caregivers have failed to provide a child with the proper supervision or care.

The Christmas season always brings a wide variety of new toys to children such as bikes, skateboards and toy vehicles. Many children will try out these toys during the Christmas season and are often inexperienced in their use. The Amherst Police would like everyone to be extra careful when travelling your neighbourhoods during this time as you may come across one of these riders.

Parties are a big part of the holiday season. Along with the parties comes an increase in those who choose to drink and drive. Our officers will be increasing the frequency of our vehicle checkpoints during the holidays targeting drivers who are under the influence. I would also remind you that we have officers who are specifically trained to detect drivers who under the influence of drugs. You can do your part by pre-planning how you will travel to and from holiday events where you will be consuming. You have several options. In Amherst our local Taxi companies have extra vehicles on duty to accommodate the higher demand. The rates are reasonable and well worth the cost to ensure everyone arrives home safely. If you decide to take a personal vehicle identify a designated driver for the night and make sure they are someone who can be counted upon to fulfil this role. Don't pick the person who feels it's o.k. to have "*just a few drinks because it's the holiday season*" You can also have a sober friend come pick you up. You also have the option to walk home, weather and distance permitting.

I encourage you to report any suspected impaired drivers you observe during your travels. Cell phones have created an army of citizens who have proven to be very effective in the apprehension of impaired drivers on our roads, but remember, if you are the driver use hands free technology to make the call or pull over and then place the call.

At Home

Don't advertise the gifts that you received from the holiday season. Thieves will scout out neighbourhoods and that "widescreen TV" box sitting out for garbage may make your house a lucrative target for a break-in. People will also display their Christmas trees in front of a picture window in the front of their homes. This can invite thieves to easily view the presents around the tree. When homeowners are away from home, think about closing the curtains or blinds.

Everyone should be mindful that homes visited during the holidays may not be as child proof as your own. Be mindful with young ones who are apt to swallow small parts. Keep on hand a list of local emergency numbers with you.

Clean up after your "adult" parties before going to bed. Toddlers can wake up early while parents are sleeping in to rest up from the night before. If you have left out dangerous items such as unfinished drinks, tobacco, or sharp knives, the safety of your child may be at risk. Call 911 if you have an emergency. If you believe your child may have ingested a noxious substance you can also call the IWK Poison Control Centre toll free at 1-800-565-8161.

Inspect all Christmas lights for any issues before stringing them around the house. A live Christmas tree should be freshly cut and not dried out. Routinely water the tree to keep it lasting longer. Artificial trees should always be listed as fire retardant.

I may have sounded a bit like Scrooge during this week's article but my advice was given in the spirit of the holidays. On behalf of all the staff of the Amherst Police Department I wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season. See you in 2014!!!