

## **Personal Security & Safety Tips: At home & while away**

**Jason Hamilton, CPP**

Given the recent economic turmoil and the downturn in our national economy, reports of crimes involving thefts and burglaries have risen in recent months. These incidents have spread into Sarasota and surround areas as stories detailing these facts have recently appeared in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, *Venice Gondolier* and a number of security periodicals I regularly review.

In fact, because of the rise and ties to foreclosure rates, a nationally recognized crime risk analysis company, *The CAP Index Inc*, is currently adding new variables into its database in order better predict and manage risk. For reference, the *CAP Index* is used by government and major corporations to help predict and forecast the risk of crime, as the index includes information involving *Crimes Against Property* and *Persons* in its analysis. More information on the *CAP Index* can be found at <http://www.capindex.com>.

As I have experienced these concerns within my own community over the past year so have other communities in our area, given the widespread reports I've been privy to. Local reports of these acts are clearly on the rise.

With these developments, the Sarasota County Sheriff's Department is predicting a rise over the coming months in the incidence of *Petty Crimes*. Reasons range from the economy and its effects on everyone but specifically, on teens unable to find summer jobs, parents unable to give them money and combination of free time teens without jobs will clearly have. I don't think it is a stretch to say these incidents are clearly on the minds of community owners, property managers and residents.

With these things in mind, I'd like to share these tips in order to help each of you keep yourself, your family and your home safe and secure, whether at home or out in the community:

### **Home & Vehicle Security Tips**

Residents should take the following actions to help reduce incidents within their neighborhood and mitigate the potential for identity theft:

1. Park in the garage whenever possible and lock vehicles even when in the garage;
2. Lock vehicles parked in driveways at all times;
3. Remove all garage door openers and portable electronic devices such as **GPS units, Satellite Radios, DVD players, etc – anything a thief might “want”**, from vehicles parked outside overnight;
4. Never display personally identifying information in your vehicle for passers-by to see. Examples might include mail, magazines, receipts or any other item that can tell a potential thief who you or your family are or where you may live or what your “habits” are;
5. Never keep any personally identifying information in your GPS unit – portable or factory installed, such as “HOME”, “WORK” or “SCHOOL”;
6. If you have a security system, USE IT. Set security alarms when away from the home, even for a short time;
7. Use your security system's “STAY” feature while you are home, for personal protection;
8. If you don't have a security system, consider purchasing one or at least having a security professional conduct a security audit of your home;
9. Lock doors when working outside around the home or in the backyard. When taking the kids or dog for a walk, lock doors and windows;
10. At night, lock doors between the garage and the house. A deadbolt lock is the best protection;
11. Lock bikes when not in use, preferably inside your garage;

12. Close garage doors and blinds/curtains after dark;
13. Keep post lamps in working order; add landscape lighting and keep carriage lights on during evening hours;
14. Notify the property manager or community staff of any street or community lights that are not working;
15. Add the telephone number for the Sarasota Sheriff's Department to your cell and home phones' speed dial for quick access (see below for reference).

### **While Away:**

Take the following precautions to help protect yourself, your family, your vehicle & belongings:

1. If you choose to shop at night, with or without a companion, park in well lit parking areas and remember where you parked. Criminals will take advantage of any opportunity to surprise you, especially confusion;
2. Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. Keep cash in your front pocket whenever you carry it.
3. Pay for purchases with a check, credit or debit card whenever possible. It is much easier to dispute fraudulent charges with a credit or debit card in particular.
4. Keep a record of all of your credit card numbers in a safe place at home. Notify your bank or credit card issuer immediately if your debit or credit card is lost, stolen or misused;
5. **NEVER carry your Social Security Card or anything else that may identify this number, on your person or in a purse or wallet.** Having this number is a key ingredient in identity theft;
6. Keep all receipts for purchased merchandise on your person until you return home. Receipts kept in bags in your vehicle can potentially display personal information and gives any thief an easy way to return an item they steal from you;
7. Stay alert to your surroundings at all times, both inside and outside. Thieves look for the easiest target that is either confused or oblivious to their surroundings.
8. When walking to your vehicle, have any bags or packages in one hand and look around before and as you walk to your vehicle. Make sure the area around your vehicle is clear before you approach;
9. Carry your keys, pointed end out, in your free hand as it will allow you to quickly unlock your car. If you are approached, you can use this key in a "quick jab" of an attacker to avoid personal injury.

### **Reporting Security or Safety Concerns**

If you see suspicious activity at home, report it as follows:

- For suspicious activity or situations, call the Sarasota Sheriff NON EMERGENCY number: **941-316-1201**;
- **Call 9-1-1 for TRUE emergencies** – when an imminent threat to LIFE or property is observed.



Jason Hamilton is the Vice President & Managing Partner of ALERT Protective Services, a Sarasota-based security, patrol service, security consulting and investigations company. Jason is a *Certified Protection Professional (CPP)* as awarded by *ASIS International*, the world's largest organization for security professionals. With his Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice, he has 15 years of experience in security, loss prevention, risk management, emergency response and adult training. Jason is also an active member and gold sponsor in the *Community Association Institute (CAI) West Florida Chapter*, an association for community HOA boards, property managers and their associated business partners.