

# TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

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## Keep your home safe

Don't let the holidays become an opportunity for criminals

For many of us, the holidays are a mixture of fun and frantic shopping, joyful times and a hectic pace. Criminals, however, see the holiday season as full of opportunities — the perfect time to take advantage of seasonal chaos.

“With everything going on, the holiday season is no time to let your guard down when it comes to home security,” says Jim Boots of Protection 1 ([www.protection1.com](http://www.protection1.com)), the largest privately owned security company in the U.S. “Criminals know that our holiday habits can leave our homes, belongings and personal information vulnerable. It's important to be vigilant throughout the year, and especially during the holidays. According to the FBI, there's a burglary every 14 seconds in the U.S. And, with homes and cars filled with new gifts and gadgets, the holidays are an especially lucrative time for thieves.”

Fortunately, by taking some simple precautions, you protect your home, purchases and identity from predators this holiday season.

### Secure your home

“Burglars know many people travel during the holidays, and many more will leave brand-new, valuable merchandise in their homes when they're out,” Boots says. “A criminal is more likely to target a home that looks vulnerable. The best thing homeowners can do to protect their homes is to make it clear to burglars that their house won't be an easy mark.”

Reduce the risk of burglary by:

- Putting inside and outside lights on a timer to make your home look occupied while you're away.

- Keeping bushes, trees and decorations from obscuring the view of your front door from the road.

- Suspending newspaper and mail delivery if you'll be away for several days.

Consider installing a cost-effective home security system, provided by a trusted company such as Protection 1, that allows you to control everything remotely from a mobile or Web-based system, such as a smart phone or laptop. A home with-

out a security system is two to three times more likely to be burglarized, according to a study by Temple University. With Protection 1's eSecure service you can check on, arm or disarm your home security system remotely, communicate with the system via text message, and even place sensors on specific areas inside your home that you want to protect such as jewelry boxes, TVs or even the gifts under the Christmas tree. The service also provides portable surveillance cameras that you can place in your home, or take with you to monitor the inside of your hotel room while you're out.

While you're keeping bad guys out, don't overlook fire safety as well. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are the top days for home candle fires, according to the U.S. Fire Administration. Christmas trees account for 200 fires annually, resulting in six deaths, 25 injuries and more than \$6 million in property damage, the administration's statistics show. Remember, never leave candles burning and don't overload electrical sockets with decorative lights. However, should there be an accident a monitored system from Protection 1 automatically dispatches the fire department, just in case you're away from the house, asleep or unable to respond.

### Stay safe when you're out

Thieves know our holiday shopping habits and can make us vulnerable

to theft while we're out and about. From breaking into cars to "shoulder surfing" for credit card information and PIN numbers, criminals take every opportunity to brighten the holidays for themselves. When holiday shopping, keep these safety tips in mind:

- Never leave shopping bags, wrapped gifts or other valuables visible inside the car.

Always place them in the trunk.

- Carry only the credit card you need and one piece of ID when shopping. Leave your Social Security card at home or in a secure place.

- Be aware of who might be looking over your shoulder as you type a PIN number.

- Courtesy of ARA Content