

Celebrating with family and friends, the exchanging of gifts, and a general spirit of peace and thanksgiving are part of the joys of the holiday season. I hope that all of you experience these blessings in your life as we journey through the end of this year and into the beginning of the next. It is also my hope that all of you are able to avoid the pain and frustration of becoming a crime victim or the heartache of poor personal choices.

Thieves and burglars are well aware of the fact that people are shopping for and accumulating merchandise in their homes to help make special their particular holiday celebration. Making time to practice crime prevention strategies should be part of your holiday preparations to help keep your season bright. Always remove valuables from your vehicles and keep your vehicle locked, no matter where it is parked or how long you will be leaving it unattended. If you cannot remove valuables from the vehicle, keep them out of sight from prying eyes. Keep the area around your home well-lit and easily seen. Thieves go to great lengths to avoid being seen as they work to steal your things. Making it as difficult as possible to hide around your vehicles or residences will deter thieves. Secure your home with quality deadbolts on all entrances and keep them locked when you are away. Pay special attention to doors into your homes that are not visible from the road or a neighbor's residence. Burglars often look for these entrances as a means to break into your home without being noticed. Get to know your neighbors and take the time to watch out for each other and suspicious activity. If you are a person who is home during daytime hours, be especially watchful for suspicious activity, as most burglaries in our area occur during daytime hours when many homes are empty. Strangers who knock at your door asking for people who don't live in the area or offering up other unlikely reasons for being in your neighborhood should arouse your suspicion. Most burglars will knock on the door of a residence before breaking in and present some kind of poorly constructed excuse for being in the area if someone does answer. If you do see suspicious activity, report it to law enforcement right away. Just like with your vehicles, keep valuables in your homes secure and out of sight. A burglar may be less likely to risk entering your home if they are unable to see items of value from the outside. If you are shopping online, beware of porch pirates. These black hearted criminals roam our streets and follow delivery trucks looking for unattended packages to plunder. Take steps to avoid having packages delivered to empty homes. Consider a scheduled delivery to your home, delivery to your place of business, or delivery to a friend or neighbor who will be home. Most shipping companies also offer delivery to secure off-site locations. Keep that amazing gift from Amazon from becoming some criminal's latest treasure.

Most everyone in our area uses a vehicle to get where they need to go. Statistically, driving is the most dangerous activity any of us will undertake in our day. Keep the odds of avoiding a holiday-wrecking crash in your favor by practicing safe driving techniques. Put away distractions, obey traffic laws, and use patience behind the wheel during this busy season. Making the choice to be sober behind the wheel during the holiday season is also vital. Many celebrations will come and go during this time. Some of these celebrations will involve alcohol. A sure way to disrupt a holiday season is an arrest for DUI or even worse, a personal injury accident caused by an intoxicated driver. Sober driving will keep you off the naughty list this year. Arriving safely is the best present you can give to those closest to you during this holiday season; drive with care.

May your holiday season be a joyous and safe time for you and your family. Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and a Happy New Year to you all!

For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.