

Many people looked upon 2021 with anticipation that it would be better than 2020. In review, I think most share the opinion that 2021 turn out to be as agreeable as flatulence in a space suit. However, as the new year begins, we instinctively turn our hopes to 2022 for the prospect of brighter days. For some, working toward a brighter future involves making new year's resolutions. Perhaps you've resolved to improve your exercise or diet habits, spend money more wisely, or spend more time with family. As your public-safety minded sheriff, I'd like to make a pitch for you to include crime prevention resolutions on your list in 2022.

The cornerstone of any crime prevention and safety strategy is situational awareness. For those not familiar with this term, situational awareness is a state of mind in which a person is aware of the environment around them and the events occurring in that environment with respect to how these may affect a person's safety and security. In other words, a person who is paying attention. We've all seen the videos of people walking into fountains, completely focused on their cell phone and completely lacking situational awareness. While you may not have ever walked into a fountain, think about the last time you were in public. How much of that time were you unaware of the people and things going on around you? The key to every day situational awareness lies in balancing distractions with the need to remain alert to what is going on around you. A person at a large gathering of strangers in an unfamiliar place needs to devote more resources to situational awareness than a person enjoying the solitude of their mostly unoccupied local park. Avoid the metaphorical fountains in your path in 2022 by practicing good situational awareness.

Theft remains the most common crime investigated by the Benton County Sheriff's Office. In 2021, we investigated over 130 theft complaints. Theft prevention comes down to making it as difficult as possible for a thief to access your valuables. Take valuables out of your vehicles when left unattended; lock the doors on your vehicles, homes, and outbuildings; and keep valuables out of sight whenever possible. Even with these strategies, thieves may still strike at your property. Having a security system that records quality video footage can provide us with important evidence to help find and arrest the thief. A record of the make, model, and serial numbers of items like electronics, firearms, power tools, or other valuables will increase the odds we are able to recover your property. Make sure any thief targeting your property in 2022 must play the game on expert mode.

Just after theft on this list of most common crimes in Benton County is Fraud. Scams come at us from all directions in our modern world. Telephone calls, emails, text messages, and social media messages have all become avenues for criminals to troll the world for their next victim. Any time someone contacts you unexpectedly, regardless of who they say they are or why they are reaching out, you should automatically be suspicious. Your best response is, much like so many of the walleyes I have tried to catch, to simply ignore these criminals and let their bait pass on by without a reaction. For those who already know and understand this well, please think about friends and family who need to hear this message. You could be the person that keeps them from becoming another victim. Employ and spread the power of skepticism to avoid scams in 2022.

New year's resolutions are hard. According to US News & World Report, 80% of us fail to achieve our resolution goals. I can confidently say that implementing any of the crime prevention resolutions listed above is going to be much easier than doing 30 minutes on the treadmill or having the will power to opt for a salad instead of the fries. I wish you well in all your new year's resolutions and hope that you'll join us in working to make 2022 a safer year for you and your family. 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.