



Town of Boxborough Police Department



Warren B. Ryder
Chief of Police

BOXBOROUGH POLICE DEPARTMENT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

“YOUR SAFETY AND SECURITY – HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF” MAY 2011

As part of our mission to serve this community, the Boxborough Police Department realizes the importance of preventing crime. From time to time, we will be presenting valuable information that will help prevent you from being victimized by criminals.

All of us have to be proactive in our approach to staying safe. Simply stated, this means increasing our awareness to the potential hazards around us. Being vigilant is everyone's responsibility. You are familiar with the surroundings of your neighborhood. If you see something that looks out of place or suspicious, call us right away so that we can investigate. We are your police department, ready to respond whenever you need us.

The following is an article that recently appeared in Consumer Reports magazine. Please take a moment to read it and think about the ways that you can improve your personal safety.

Making a break-in too easy

"About half of all break-ins aren't break-ins but walk-ins," says Bob Portenier, consultant, lecturer, and former burglar. "Families get in a hurry in the morning -- kids going to school, running late for work, doctors' appointments, what have you -- and forget to take that one or two minutes to check the doors and locks, usually on the back side. You have a pet, you let it out to do its business -- and then forget the security French door or sliding glass door."

Remember, don't forget to turn on your home alarm. In a security survey of 1,038 U.S. homeowners we conducted in February, 43 percent of people in our survey who had an alarm said they at least occasionally don't turn it on when they're not at home. Some other troubling numbers. Nineteen percent of people in our survey said they at least occasionally leave doors at home unlocked when they're out, and 26 percent of survey respondents said they at least occasionally leave windows unlocked when they're not at home.

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Leaving your garage door open

In addition to providing access to everything in the garage, the door most likely leads to an interior door and access to your house. That interior door probably isn't as strong as an exterior door. And once a burglar's in your garage, the neighbors can't see him.



Photo illustration: Stephen Webster

Obscuring your house

Tall hedges and fences hide windows and doors, giving thieves cover to work, says Walter T. Shaw, former burglar and co-author of "A License to Steal."

Leaving valuables in sight

"When we targeted a house, we would approach the door and look in -- the quality of furniture, whatever there was -- to give us an idea of how these people spend their money," says Portenier. "So with mirror-tinted windows, it eliminates that."

Advertising a vacation

People often don't do anything to make the house look occupied, says Maj. Kurt Philipps of the Memphis police department. Lt. John Dzwlewicz of the New York City police department suggests this trick: Put some inexpensive kids' toys on the lawn. On Facebook, share news of your trip only after you return.



Photo illustration: Stephen Webster

Being carefree with keys

Leaving keys under the doormat or elsewhere outside the home is a risk that 12 percent of people in our survey say they often take. Another 7 percent say they do it occasionally. And 66 percent say they have given a key to someone other than a resident of their home.

And avoid hiding your car keys inside or outside the car. That just makes it easier for thieves to engage in a spur-of-the-moment theft, authorities say. Many of today's cars make it difficult to lock your keys inside. If you're concerned about that anyway, keep a spare in your wallet or purse. Eleven percent of people in our survey said they at least occasionally leave car keys in the ignition when parked. And 52 percent of people from non-metro areas in our survey said they at least occasionally leave their car unlocked outside.

Tossing prescription bottles

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Prescription labels on pill bottles can contain important information such as phone numbers, doctors, and prescription numbers. Remove the labels and shred them. Also be careful with medical records. And also treat your benefit claims forms, insurance reimbursements, and even medical tests as confidential information and destroy them before discarding.

Thinking a gun is your best defense

Gun ownership is a controversial topic, but research has shown that homeowners with guns increase the risks in their home. Homeowners might make the mistake of not getting proper training and not securing their firearms. Thirty-two percent reported having a gun as a security measure. And 73 percent of gun owners thought it was very good or excellent for protection.

With Your Electronics

Using lazy passwords

It pays to make the passwords you use tougher to guess. Don't make it easy for hackers. That means never using passwords such as "welcome" or "password." Instead mix up letters and numbers to make for tougher encryption.

Falling for phishing

The e-mail that contains what looks like a link to your financial institution might be phony; cyber thieves will record your keystrokes as you enter passwords, giving them access to your accounts. Don't click on such links; type the correct Web address into the browser.



Photo illustration: Stephen Webster

Running outdated software

Always run the latest version of your browser, which will probably include better security features, says Kevin Mitnick, a former infamous computer hacker and now CEO of Mitnick Security Consulting, a computer-security business. And Mitnick says that when a software company such as Adobe tells you there's an update for your software, pay attention and run the update. Programs such as Flash and Adobe Acrobat are among the most exploited by cyber criminals.

Instant-messaging programs and media players are also targets. To make sure software on your computer is up to date, Mitnick advises running a program such as the free Personal Software Inspector.

For Your Personal Finances

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Banking from a public computer

Keylogging malware that can capture account numbers, passwords, and other vital data is a risk that has been linked to use of open Wi-Fi connections and public computers such as those in hotel lobbies.

Using unfamiliar ATMs

Thieves have been known to put out-of-order signs on a legitimate ATM and set up nearby freestanding bogus ones that "skim" data from your card. ATMs located inside banks within view of surveillance cameras aren't risk-free, but they pose more challenges for crooks installing skimming equipment.

Two other important pieces of advice related to ATMs: Separate your PIN code from your ATM or debit card. Almost 1 in 10 people carry their code with the card, says ACI Worldwide, a payment systems company. And when typing your PIN into an ATM or card reader, use your free hand to shield the keypad from the view of hidden cameras or anyone nearby.

Dropping your guard at gas pumps

Card-skimming at gas stations is likely to increase during summer months, especially in vacation areas, so use cash or credit cards at the pumps if possible. If you must use a debit card, select the option to have the purchase processed as a credit-card transaction rather than typing in your PIN.



Photo illustration: Stephen Webster

Ignoring your credit or debit cards

Monitor your accounts at least weekly to spot and report unauthorized transactions as soon as possible. Use services offered by your bank or card issuer that can help protect you, such as an e-mail or text alert if a transaction occurs for more than a certain amount.

Abandoning your receipts

Many transactions, such as filling up your tank and making a debit-card withdrawal, leave a paper trail. Don't toss away receipts in the ATM lobby or leave them at the gas pump. Hold on to them until your transactions have cleared your bank account to make sure the totals match. Then shred the receipts if they have any information a thief might use.

Trashing your bills

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Thieves harvest sensitive data from account statements and other financial documents placed in the trash and use them for ID theft, says Inspector Michael Romano of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. Shred them first.

6 Ways to Stay Safer

1. Watch out for imposters

The fastest-growing scam in the past year has been imposter fraud, according to the latest annual report on consumer complaints from the Federal Trade Commission. Thieves claiming to be someone they're not (such as a friend or relative stranded overseas in need of cash to get home, a bill collector, or an employee of a government agency) use Facebook messages, e-mail, phone calls, and text messages to persuade people to send money or divulge personal information such as Social Security or account numbers. Last year, 60,000 people reported that they were affected by this form of fraud, up from just five cases reported in 2008.

2. Learn to parallel park

Car thieves are becoming more professional. They're stealing new cars by putting them on a flatbed tow truck, our expert says. Parallel parking hinders access to the front and rear of your car, making it difficult to tow. Also, be careful about whom you bump into at the grocery store, especially if your car has keyless entry and a push-button ignition. A thief with an antenna and a small kit of electronics can transmit your key's code to another thief standing near your car, allowing him to open it, start it, and drive it away.

3. Hide the stuff in your car

Don't leave electronics and other valuables visible inside your car. GPS units are less of a magnet these days; cell phones and laptops more so. Holiday gifts are a big target, so don't stack them up in the backseat. Is there a worse move? Yes. Leaving your stuff in the back of a pickup truck.

4. Change your PIN

Make it a habit to routinely change the secret code for your debit card or ATM card. That gives you better protection against any thieves or skimming schemes.

5. Keep a financial inventory

Once a year take out all of the cards in your wallet, make a list of the account numbers and contact information you'll need to cancel cards if they become lost or stolen, and hide it in a safe place, says Mark Rasch, a former Department of Justice computer-crime prosecutor who is a director at CSC, a business technology firm based in Falls Church, Va.

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6. Change your Wi-Fi password

If you have a home wireless network, choose the highest-security option. That way your Web-browsing and financial transactions will be more protected. Go a step further and create your own administrative password rather than rely on a default password supplied by the router.

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