

Other McGruff brochures available from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority:

Don't let a crook ruin your holidays! Provides tips on how to shop safely, protect your home and valuables, and avoid fraud.

You can fight crime in your neighborhood! Provides information on how to prevent crime and start a neighborhood watch program.



TAKE A BITE OUT OF
CRIME

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**ILLINOIS
CRIMINAL JUSTICE
INFORMATION AUTHORITY**

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Seniors, protect yourselves from crime!



McGruff® the Crime Dog here. Research shows that people 65 and older are victims of crime far less frequently than younger people. But seniors are more vulnerable to certain crimes — particularly burglary, theft and fraud. You can reduce opportunities for criminals to strike by following these tips. So join me — let's "Take A Bite Out Of Crime."

Be safe and alert when you are out

- ◆ Whenever possible, run errands with friends. Always make sure someone knows where you're going and when you'll return.
- ◆ If you must carry a purse, hold it close to your body; don't let it dangle. Put a wallet in an inside jacket pocket or front pocket, not the back pocket.
- ◆ Never display large sums of money in stores or other places, and never put your purse or wallet on a counter while you examine merchandise in a store.
- ◆ Don't overburden yourself with packages that obstruct your view and make it difficult to react.
- ◆ Carry change for emergency phone and transportation use.
- ◆ Avoid dark, deserted routes, even if they're the shortest.
- ◆ Try not to wait alone at deserted bus stops. If you can, walk to another stop where others may be waiting. On the bus, try to sit near the driver.

- ◆ Always have your car or house keys in hand as you approach your vehicle or home.
- ◆ When you drive, keep doors locked and windows up. Park in well-lighted, busy areas. If you have car trouble, be wary of strangers who offer help. Stay in your car and ask them to call a service truck or the police.
- ◆ If a friend or a taxi takes you home, ask the driver to wait until you are safely inside.

Protect yourself and your home

- ◆ Keep your doors locked at all times, even when you're in the house. Use deadbolt locks on exterior doors. Install a peephole in the door and use it.
- ◆ Make your home appear occupied when you go out by using a timer to turn on lights and a radio or TV.
- ◆ Don't hide extra house keys under a doormat or in other outside spots. Burglars know where to find them.

- ◆ Never let strangers in your home without checking their identification, and never accept an unsolicited “free” inspection of your furnace, roof, air conditioner or anything else in your home. Also, never leave inspectors alone when they are in your home. Don’t give them an opportunity to tamper with your home or belongings. If you aren’t sure about a worker, call the company.
- ◆ Get to know your neighbors, and keep their phone numbers in case of emergencies. Use the “buddy” system to check on each other daily.



- ◆ If you arrive home and suspect a stranger is inside, do not go inside. Leave quietly and call the police — your safety should always come first.

Watch out for scams

- ◆ Don’t fall for anything that sounds too good to be true — a free vacation, miracle cures for cancer and arthritis, “good deals” on home repairs, and get-rich-quick schemes.
- ◆ Beware of people claiming you owe money for an item ordered by a deceased spouse or relative. Also beware of people claiming to represent companies or other organizations that offer to recover lost money from fraudulent telemarketers for a fee.
- ◆ When sales people call, wait; don’t buy today. If it’s legitimate, they’ll call back tomorrow. If you are interested in buying, first check out the company with your local consumer affairs office or the Better Business Bureau.

According to the American Association of Retired Persons, older citizens are victims of fraudulent schemes far out of proportion to their population numbers. Read the newspaper to stay informed about the latest con schemes in your community. Don’t rush into anything. Check everything out with friends, lawyers, the police department, Better Business Bureau, or your local consumer affairs department.

- ◆ Never give your credit card, phone card, Social Security, or bank account number to anyone over the phone. It’s illegal for telemarketers to ask for these numbers to verify a prize or gift.
- ◆ Don’t let anyone rush you into signing anything — an insurance policy, a sales agreement or a contract. First read everything carefully and have someone you trust check it over.

What if I’m a victim?

- ◆ If you are attacked and the person just wants your belongings, don’t resist. Your life and safety are worth more than your possessions.
- ◆ Make a conscious effort to get an accurate description of the criminal: age, race, complexion, clothing, height and weight, hair, eyes, and unusual features.
- ◆ Call the police immediately and explain what happened.
- ◆ If you have been swindled, or suspect fraud, contact your local police department. You may be embarrassed because you were tricked, but your information is vital in catching the con artist and preventing others from being victimized.
- ◆ Contact your local victim assistance agency to help you deal with the trauma that all crime victims experience. The staff can help you learn more about counseling, victims compensation laws and how to follow your case’s progress.