

Sheriff Offers Tips for Holiday Shoppers

Written by Brian Fisher

Thursday, 28 November 2013 16:09

With many taking advantage of deals and discounts on the shopping holiday popularly known as "Black Friday," Avery County Sheriff Kevin Frye is offering tips to help shoppers in the High Country remain safe and to avoid theft and fraud.

"The holiday season is right around the corner and shoppers are crowding malls and discount stores to buy the latest gadgets and find the best deals," Sheriff Frye said.

Frye said that shoppers may be neglecting is their safety. According to Sheriff Frye, "this time of year attracts more shopping-related criminal activity because of the larger crowds and the extended store hours. These factors and the usual distraction of shopping, creates a more favorable environment for petty thieves and other offenders."

The Sheriff reminds all Avery County residents to follow these safety tips:

Shopping Safety:

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- A single shopper is the best target for theft. Always shop with a friend or relative.

- When going shopping, tell someone where you are going and what time to expect you to return. Also, make sure they know what you are wearing, as well as the type of vehicle you are driving.

- Shop during daylight hours. If you shop at night, park your vehicle in a well-lit area.

- Dress casually and comfortably and avoid wearing expensive jewelry. If carrying cash, keep it in your front pocket rather than in a purse or wallet. This makes it much more difficult for a pick-pocket to remove. Also store car keys in a pants or jacket pocket. If your purse is stolen, you will still be able to drive home.

- Pay careful attention to your surroundings and avoid overloading yourself with packages. It is important to have clear visibility and freedom of motion to avoid mishaps.

- When returning to your vehicle, check around it and in the back seat. Be aware of strangers approaching you for any reason. Have your car keys in your hand to avoid spending unnecessary time unprotected from the security of your vehicle.

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- If you feel uneasy returning to your vehicle alone, find a security guard and ask them to walk you to your car.

According to Sheriff Frye, “during this time of year, busy holiday shoppers become careless and vulnerable to other crimes as well. Credit card fraud and gift card fraud are on the rise. However, taking a few preventive measures can help.”

Tips to Avoid Credit Card Fraud:

- Keep a close watch on your credit card every time you use it, and make sure you get it back as quickly as possible.

- Never write your PIN number on your credit card.

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- Check the company out. Only do business with companies that provide a physical address and telephone number.

- Keep good records. Always print out a copy of any online products or services you purchase.

Tips to Avoid Gift Card Fraud:

- Never buy gift cards from online auction sites. This is a large source of gift card fraud. Many of the gift cards are stolen, counterfeit or used.

- Only buy gift cards directly from the store issuing the gift card or from a secure retailer's website.

- Don't buy gift cards off of publicly displayed racks in retail stores. Only purchase gift cards at the sales terminal from the cashier.

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- Always carefully examine both the front and back of a gift card before you buy it. If you see a PIN number, ask for a different card. If the card looks like it has been tampered with in any way, put it back.

- Always ask the store cashier to scan the gift card in front of you. This will guarantee that your card is valid when you buy it and that it reflects the balance you just charged it with.

- Always keep your receipt as a proof of purchase as long as there is money stored on the gift card.

- If possible, register your gift card at the store's website.

- Never give your Social Security number, date of birth or any other unneeded private information when purchasing a gift card. No reputable company will ask for this information.

In light of these problems, Sheriff Frye warns shoppers to be careful so that they don't become the victim of criminal activity. "Unfortunately, when shopping, people have a tendency to let their guard down," Sheriff Frye said. "However, paying attention and taking precautions can

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help eliminate their chances of being victimized.”