

DON'T BE A VICTIM – BE AWARE

ARCADIA SAFETY EXPERTS OFFER TIPS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

PATROLS STEPPED UP AT THE MALL AFTER WAVE OF LOOTINGS

It's the time of year when you make a list and check it twice – and No. 1 on that list should be vigilance, according to the professionals who work to keep Arcadia safe.

The Arcadia Police Dept. keeps watch around the clock on homes and businesses in the city, along with teams of security officers employed by the private sector.

And right now, police are keeping a close eye on Westfield Santa Anita mall amid a wave of crime targeting retail and entertainment districts, Police Sgt. John Bonomo said. Organized gangs have been invading stores and stealing merchandise and other criminals have been following people home from entertainment destinations and robbing them.

“We've taken extra measures since the very first incident in San Francisco,” Bonomo said. “We have officers dedicated to the mall and we've stepped up our patrols and increased our presence, hopefully to prevent crime.”

He said Arcadia residents and business people play a big role in reducing crime by keeping an eye on one another.

“We're not a crime-ridden city,” he said. “Your own neighborhood, your neighbors are the best defense.”

At Post Alarm Systems Inc., HR director Roy Blanco said criminals take advantage of people distracted by holiday activities.

“You get busy, you're shopping, you come home and you leave the garage door open overnight,” Blanco said.

“Those things happen this time of year. People leave their garage door opener in the car, leave the car in the driveway, then somebody can get into your car and then open your garage door. There you go, that's a target.”

Post Alarm, a Chamber member at 47 E. St. Joseph St., has a roster of 40 patrol officers who work around the clock, and clients divided almost evenly between residential and business addresses. The company has most of its clients in and around Arcadia, and across Los Angeles and Orange counties, Blanco said.

“Typically the areas we patrol, a lot of the time these burglaries aren’t random,” he said. “The criminals are watching, casing things, they watch an area for a while, they notice the patterns, see the people coming and going and that’s where the vulnerabilities are.”

“If they see our patrols in the area, they’re a lot less likely to do anything,” Blanco said. “They’ll go find another area that is not patrolled.”

“We tell people to reduce their vulnerability,” Blanco said. “Don’t make yourself a target.”

Sgt. Bonomo offers tips on staying safe over the holidays:

Shopping and Dining

--- When you go to any business, be sure to park as close to the entrance as possible. Keep your keys in your hands when you get out of your vehicle and walk to the entryway. Stay off the phone and pay close attention to your surroundings.

On the Job

--- When you leave work, hold your keys in your hands. If a strange car or a stranger is near your vehicle, stand back and wait till they leave. If you see anybody who looks suspicious, call the police. Check the interior of your vehicle before you unlock it and get in. If any windows are broken or the door is open, step away and call the police.

Driving Anywhere

--- When you get in your vehicle, start it up and drive away. If you think you’re being followed, stop at a public place – a gas station, convenience store, restaurant or to your local police or fire station.

At Home

--- Keep your doors locked, even when you’re at home. Don’t leave anything of valuable where it can be seen through a window. Never open a door to a stranger or solicitor. If you see a suspicious-looking stranger in your neighborhood, call the police.

“We can’t be everywhere,” Bonomo said. “So when people call and say come over here and take a look, we get somebody over there.”

“Just like they say: If you see something, say something.”

--MIKE LUCAS

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Technicians monitor video feeds at Control Central at Post Alarm Systems Inc. in Arcadia.