



HOLIDAY SAFETY AND SECURITY TIPS

BY GRANT CUNNINGHAM



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This is a wonderful time of year, full of joy and good cheer. (Hey, I could write greeting cards!) Yet not everyone looks at the holiday season in the same spirit. For some, this is an invitation to larceny — or worse. How do you keep yourself and your family safe from harm yet still be able to enjoy the festivities? Consider these personal safety and holiday security tips:

PERSPECTIVE

The first things to do are take a deep breath and relax. While crime rates do go up at this time of the year, it's no reason to get paranoid and turn every outing or activity into a military operation complete with ops, comms, and extraction plans. Take sensible precautions and involve the rest of the family!

HOME SECURITY

With expensive gifts being given and received, a home invasion robbery is definitely something you'll want to protect against. As always, keep your outside lighting on and your doors locked, just as you do the rest of the year. I know it's tempting to leave the door only latched in case guests arrive, but keep that deadbolt fastened as well.

Keep your drapes closed so others can't observe your activities. It's common to want others to see your wonderfully decorated tree, but remember that it might attract the wrong kinds of visitors.

If you're in the habit of carrying a defensive handgun, do so around the house. Frankly, this is a perfect use for those ugly Christmas sweaters — you'd be surprised how well those baggy, festooned garments conceal even a bulky handgun! If it's your habit to lounge around in sweats on Christmas, a bellyband (like the excellent one from CrossBreed Holsters) works well when combined with the aforementioned ugly sweater.

If you don't have a way to carry a defensive handgun, you might consider moving your home-defense firearm from the bedroom to a more accessible location closer to where you'll be gathered. You still need to keep it out of the reach of children and unauthorized users, of course, so keep that in mind.

This is also a good time to go over your intruder alert plans with your family; how you get to the safe room and what you do when you get there, for instance. Don't have a plan yet? Then it's a perfect opportunity to give your family the gift of security: Read through some of the great articles here at the Personal Defense Network, put a plan together, and have a quick dress rehearsal or two.

Remember that a knock at the door or a ringing of the doorbell might not be Christmas carolers. Verify who's there before you unlock that deadbolt. It might not be your brother-in-law!

Finally, this is a difficult topic but one that's important to talk about. Many crimes have been perpetrated by people the victims knew in some way, and that doesn't necessarily mean friends. Think about the people you're inviting into your home. We all have "that" member of the family, the one who makes poor choices in his or her life and hangs around with less-than-stellar people. You may love them, but your family's safety must come first. If you're at all uneasy with anyone's spouse/significant other/friend-of-the-week, don't invite them behind your locked doors. Meet them in a restaurant or perhaps at a public holiday event instead.

HOLIDAY EVENTS

Speaking of events, lots of us will be going to concerts, tree lightings, and sales at the mall. Crowds are common in these venues, and it can be a chore to keep the family safe. First, have a plan in case you're separated; agree to meet at a specific place or that you'll all head for the same exit in case of trouble. If you're indoors and an attack occurs, think first about getting you and your family together and out of the building if you can do so safely. Think about exits in the back of stores or restaurants. Virtually all establishments have them, and heading out the back is often the safest way to avoid danger.

If you can't get away safely, barricade yourself in a defensive position that makes it difficult for someone to reach you. There are articles about this here at PDN, and it would be worthwhile for you to read them and become familiar with the concepts and application.

Manage your distractions. While it's important to enjoy your time out, it's also important to spend some of your limited attention on things that might be a danger to you. Look around occasionally -- is anything out of place? Has anything changed? Look at the people. Are there any whose body language and/or facial expressions suggest they're not there for the same reasons you are? Trust your gut -- if you feel something is out of place or that you might be at risk, leave. If it's something you've decided is an actual emerging threat, call 9-1-1 as you move quickly away.

Make sure everyone carries a good, high-intensity flashlight. If the lights go out or you're in a venue that is naturally darkened to show off the lighting displays, being able to see where you're going is a big advantage whether you're escaping a fire or gunfire.

Finally, if you're in a position where defending yourself becomes a necessity, do so decisively. Make the decision ahead of time that you will do whatever is necessary to keep yourself and your loved ones safe, then do it. There have been cases, one in my own region, where a defender felt some necessity to give an attacker in a public space a "fair chance" to give up the gun he was shooting others with. If you recognize that you have a lethal threat, deal with it in an appropriate manner. Once someone has decided that he or she will harm or kill others, the time for the compassion of the season is over.

HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Like many people, you may decide to worship during this season. Many of the same recommendations apply, though at least you know ahead of time where you'll be and the likely areas of attack. Again, manage your distractions while you're singing and praying. Though many congregations have security teams in place, don't let that lull you into a false sense of security, any more than guards at the mall do.

Pay some attention to who's coming and going. If you're in a smaller congregation, watch those people you don't know or haven't seen before. You may even alert the security team if you see someone who concerns you. Pay particular attention to those who seem ill at ease or are obviously agitated. It's not uncommon for family violence to erupt at this time of year.

Like you would at a mall or restaurant, know where the exits are and have a brief (but quiet) conversation with the family about how you'll exit if you need to in a hurry. If you attend a particular church regularly, have that conversation before you leave home. Keep it light and non-threatening -- your children don't need to have their holiday turn into a fearful watch for the bad guy!

Always have your cell phone and a high-intensity flashlight with you. You may choose to carry a concealed handgun, but be aware of the laws in your jurisdiction. Many states forbid concealed carry in houses of worship, and you'll need to make your own moral decision whether to go armed or not. If your church has an armed security team, think about their reaction if during an attack you jump up with your own gun. They may be expecting a gun-free zone and consider you a threat. I'm not saying you should or shouldn't carry in church, only that you need to factor all of these holiday security tips into your decision.

