

# Your Personal Safety Guide

Building  
A Collaborative Partnership  
between Citizens,  
Businesses, and the Houston Police Department



Harold L. Hurtt  
Chief of Police

*Keep* **Houston**  
**SAFE**

[www.houstonpolice.org](http://www.houstonpolice.org)

**REPORT SUSPICIOUS  
ACTIVITY  
713-884-3131**



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## ***“Keep Houston SAFE”***

### **What is “Keep Houston SAFE”**

***“Keep Houston SAFE”*** is a citywide collaborative partnership between citizens, businesses, and the Houston Police Department. The main focus is crime prevention and the implementation of proactive crime prevention efforts and measures aimed at the elimination of criminal incidents, rather than responding to them after they have occurred. Simply, the goal of ***“Keep Houston SAFE”*** is to prevent crime.

Crime Prevention requires the active cooperation of all members of the community. The Houston Police Department is working hard to catch the “bad guys” and put them behind bars, but we are counting on you, the citizens, to work together in the fight against crime. In fact, the Houston Police Department believes this team effort is so important that it is mentioned in the department’s mission statement, which states in part, that *the department will strive to enhance the quality of life in the city of Houston by working cooperatively with the public to prevent crime.*

***HOUSTON*** is a dynamic city with hard-working citizens who want a safe city. We need everyone to become involved and be energized in their efforts to protect themselves, family, and hard-earned property.

### **How Can You Help “Keep Houston SAFE”**

By pledging and practicing basic crime prevention, citizens will reduce the opportunities criminals look for when targeting a crime victim. Crime prevention starts with each person, family, and home. If we all do our part to fight crime and make it as hard as possible for a criminal to identify a crime victim, we are helping to ***“Keep Houston SAFE”***

The positive result is the reduction of crime and a safer Houston. Take the time to review the crime prevention material provided by the Houston Police Department. Make the pledge to ***“Keep Houston SAFE”*** and become a part of the solution. Remember that Crime Prevention starts with you.

***Crime Prevention*** is the anticipation, recognition, and appraisal of a crime risk and the initiation of some action to remove or reduce it.

# PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS

*The Houston Police Department wants you to be safe! By practicing these personal safety tips, you will reduce the opportunities criminals look for when targeting a crime victim.*

## Street Sense

- Always stay alert to your surroundings and avoid locations/situations that make you more vulnerable to crime such as alleys or dark parking lots.
- Avoid distractions that decrease your awareness level, ie. talking on a cell phone or wearing headphones.
- Walk with a purpose to communicate a message of confidence. Make eye contact with people, however do not engage in conversation with strangers on the street.
- Travel with family and friends. Walking in a group decreases your chances of becoming a victim.
- Stay in well-lighted areas and avoid short-cuts through deserted areas.
- Avoid displaying large amounts of cash or other tempting items, such as expensive jewelry and clothing.
- Always trust your instincts. If a person or place makes you uneasy, leave.

## Work Safety

- Never give telephone numbers, addresses or plans of fellow co-workers to anyone without their permission.
- Use discretion in revealing personal plans to people at work.
- DO NOT leave valuables in plain view. Always secure your property.
- DO NOT leave the reception area unattended.
- If you work alone or work outside of normal business hours, keep your office door locked.
- If you leave the office after hours, have a co-worker or security guard walk you to your car.

# Personal Safety Tips continued...

## Driving Safety

- Immediately lock your doors.
- DO NOT become involved with angry drivers and don't take traffic problems personally.
- Avoid eye contact with an aggressive driver and do not make obscene gestures.
- If someone is tailgating you, pull into the slow lane and allow them to pass.
- DO NOT tailgate other drivers or cut them off.
- If you have car problems, raise the hood and tie a white cloth to the door handle to signal for help. Get back into the car and keep the doors and windows locked. If someone stops, do not roll down your window. Ask them to call for help. Do not accept rides from anyone.
- If you think someone is following you, do not go home. Drive to the nearest police station, fire station, open gas station, or well-lighted place where there are people that can help you.
- Don't lose your life or the life of a passenger by becoming involved in ROAD RAGE.

## Reduce Your Chance of Being Carjacked

- Always park in a well-lighted area so you can see your car and its surroundings from a distance.
- Have your car keys ready as you approach your vehicle and look under, around, and inside your car for persons who may be hiding. If safe, enter and immediately lock all doors.
- While stopped in traffic, leave enough room between your car and the one in front of you so you can maneuver and escape if necessary.
- Keep an alert eye out for any suspicious characters at intersections.

***Remember!***

*Awareness is the key to your safety.*

# BURGLARY PREVENTION AT HOME

*A burglary is reported every 15 seconds in the United States. The U.S. Department of Justice defines household burglary as “unlawful entry or attempted entry of a residence.” This crime usually, but not always, involves theft. Of all the major criminal offenses, residential burglary is the most common. By following these simple steps, you can reduce the possibility that your home will be targeted.*

## HOME SAFETY

- Acknowledge all callers through locked doors. Before opening an exterior door to your home, know who is at the door and do not open the door to an unexpected visitor.
- Lock your doors and windows when you are at home. Criminals look for houses with the easiest entry.
- Never leave notes on your door that reveal that your home is not occupied.
- Trim Shrubs to deny intruders a hiding place to work; shrubs can block the view to the house. Walks and Driveways should also be kept free of objects or plants that might offer concealment for intruders who are trying to break into your house.
- Lawn Care is an effective indicator that someone is home. Keep your yard maintained.
- Permit easy visibility of your home by neighbors and/or police.
- Trim Tree Limbs from the bottom, up to 8 feet, to allow for clear visibility by neighbors and/or police.
- Install large reflective numbers (minimum 3 inches) on your house and mailbox so police and other emergency personnel can find your home quickly.
- Be alert in protecting not only your home, but your neighbors as well. Don't tell a stranger that your neighbor is not at home or volunteer any personal information about your neighbor.
- When traveling, have a neighbor collect the mail/newspaper or have the deliveries temporarily stopped.
- Before moving into a new house or apartment, ensure all exterior door locks on your new home are re-keyed or changed. Also change the code to the garage door opener.
- Alarms provide added protection and are most effective when used with other security techniques.  
**Remember:**
  - Choose a reputable, well established alarm company.
  - Set the alarm system at night and when away from your residence.
  - Do not write your alarm code or password on or near the alarm keypad.
  - Put a warning sign on windows and entrances to notify possible intruders you have an alarm.

# RESIDENTIAL SECURITY

## DOES YOUR HOME HAVE THESE SAFEGUARDS?

### Tip #1 Lighting

For outside lights, use photoelectric cell lights which automatically turn lights on and off at dusk and dawn.

### TIP #2 Lighting

Make your house look "lived in" by keeping lights on automatic timers, especially when not at home.

Install and use a peep-hole with a 190-degree viewing area.

Install another lock in addition to the manufacturer's lock on ALL windows.

Homes with good EXTERIOR LIGHTING will provide additional protection from intruders. Outside lighting should be located high and out of reach. A good location is under the eaves. Inexpensive timers or photoelectric cells will automatically turn the lights on and off at dusk and dawn.

Secure cash and jewelry in bonded storage.

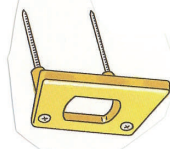
### TIP #1 Exterior Doors

All exterior doors should be equipped with double cylinder deadbolt locks having a minimum one-inch throw when in the locked position.

Close all curtains or shades at night.

### TIP #2 Exterior Doors

The deadbolt locks should use a heavy-duty strike plate secured with three-inch steel screws.



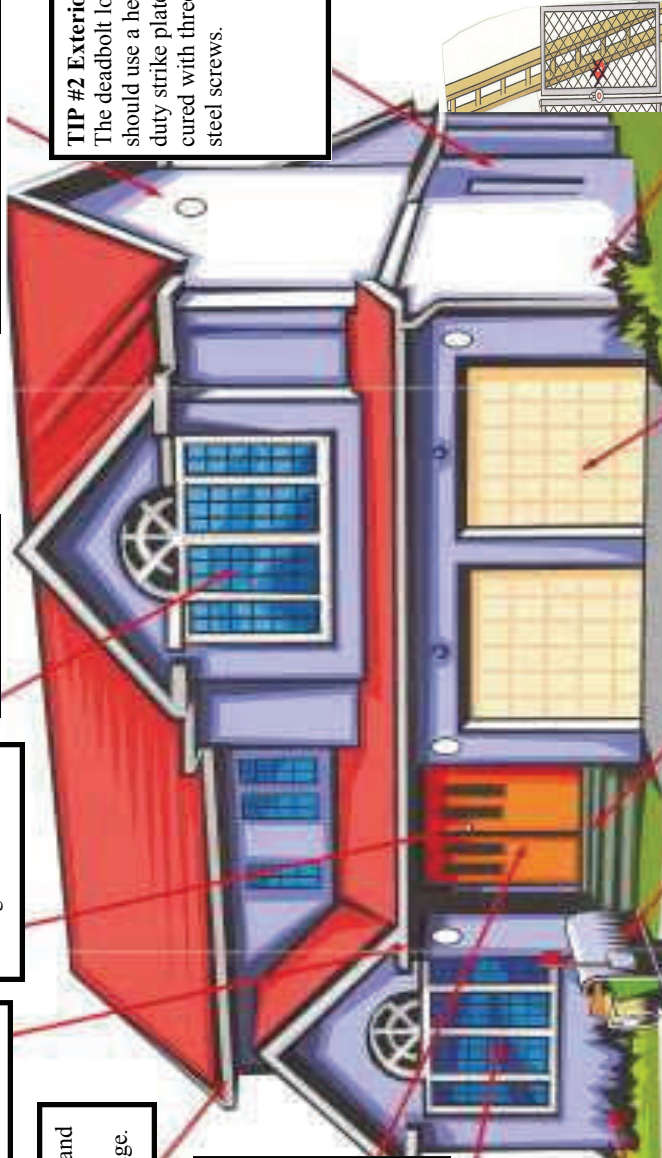
Check the shrubs and bushes around the doors and windows. They should not provide cover for an intruder attempting to force open a door or window. By trimming shrubs, you will limit the intruder's OPPORTUNITY! Place thorny plants along fences and near windows.

Use initials or just numbers on your mailbox.

Don't hide a key under the door mat...or anywhere else! Burglars know ALL the hiding spots.

Keep garage doors closed and locked even when at home.

Don't leave ladders or tools out. Burglars can use these items to break into your house. Lock them in a garage or tool shed.



# ROBBERY PREVENTION

*A robbery is one of the most serious and potentially dangerous crimes committed in the United States today. A robber commits a holdup because he or she believes that their profit will be worth the risk. By decreasing the possible profit and increasing the risk of apprehension, potential victims can reduce their chance of becoming a target.*

## Walk Alertly and Confidently

- Try not to walk alone. It's a lot safer if you walk with at least one other person.
- Be alert, walk with your head up and do not let your mind wander. Frequently scan your surroundings, that includes behind you.
- When walking at night, consider a taxi cab even for short trips.
- Trust your instincts, avoid uncomfortable situations. It's better to be safe than sorry.
- Be observant for groups of males/females driving or just hanging around.
- Do not take shortcuts through unlit, sparsely traveled paths such as trails, stairwells or alleys.

## In Parking Lots

- Arrive and leave areas early to avoid being out after dark.
- DO NOT park next to a vehicle with dark tinted windows that can prevent you from seeing if someone is sitting inside it.
- Park in a high visibility areas and check for lighting in case you leave when it is dark.
- Ask a security officer to escort you to your vehicle if you feel uncomfortable.
- Walk briskly, confidently, and directly through the parking lot. Be cautious of people handing out fliers or asking questions.
- Have your car keys ready to unlock your car door, look around and under your car and observe other vehicles parked nearby for suspicious persons before approaching.
- Watch for people who may be following you. This can occur inside as well as outside businesses. If you suspect that you are being followed, report it immediately to security or police.
- Glance into the backseat and at the floorboards of your car before entering to check for anyone hiding inside.
- DO NOT sit in a parked vehicle. If a stranger approaches your vehicle, sound your horn and don't let off.
- DO NOT open your car door or window for anyone. If someone is standing near your unoccupied vehicle, do not approach it.

# Robbery Prevention continued...

## Be Smart About Cash

- Carry only the amount of cash that you expect to use. If cash is needed use ATM or debit cards.
- Avoid outdoor ATM's, particularly at night and those in secluded areas inside.
- Be alert at banks or check cashing businesses. Carrying cash marks you as a target. Avoid showing your wallet when possible. Keep needed cash, ID, and credit cards in an accessible pocket.

## What To Do During a Robbery

DO NOT argue or fight with the robber. Any amount of money or valuables is not worth personal injury to you.

Follow the robber's directions, but do not volunteer more than asked for.

If you have to move or reach, tell the robber what you are going to do and why. Assure the robber that you will cooperate.

Make mental notes of:

- The robber's race, age, height, sex, clothing, complexion, hair, eye color, etc.
- Anything unusual about the robber such as scars or tattoos.
- The number of accomplices and how they left the scene, direction of travel, type and color of vehicle. Get the license number if you can safely do so.
- Any conversations the suspects may have with one another.
- What the suspect's weapon looked like so you can describe it later.
- Also, try to remember what the suspect touches so that fingerprints may be lifted.

## Did You Know?

- Many of the robberies occur when you're alone and are committed by one or more male robbers.
- A lot of these robberies take place on the way to and from your car, especially in shopping centers and apartment parking lots.
- The use of a cellular phone or headset, whether driving or walking, is a distraction which can increase your likelihood of being robbed.
- Robbery is a crime of violence that threatens the safety and quality of life of a community.
- Robbery is a crime of opportunity that can be reduced through awareness and prevention.
- Robbers are serial criminals and will continue to prey on victims until arrested.
- Failure to report a robbery, not prosecuting the criminal if you are a victim, not providing information to police or Crime Stoppers about robbers ensures continued victimization.
- One of the most important robbery reduction strategies is to arrest the criminal.



# BURGLARY OF A MOTOR VEHICLE

*The Houston Police Department wants you to*

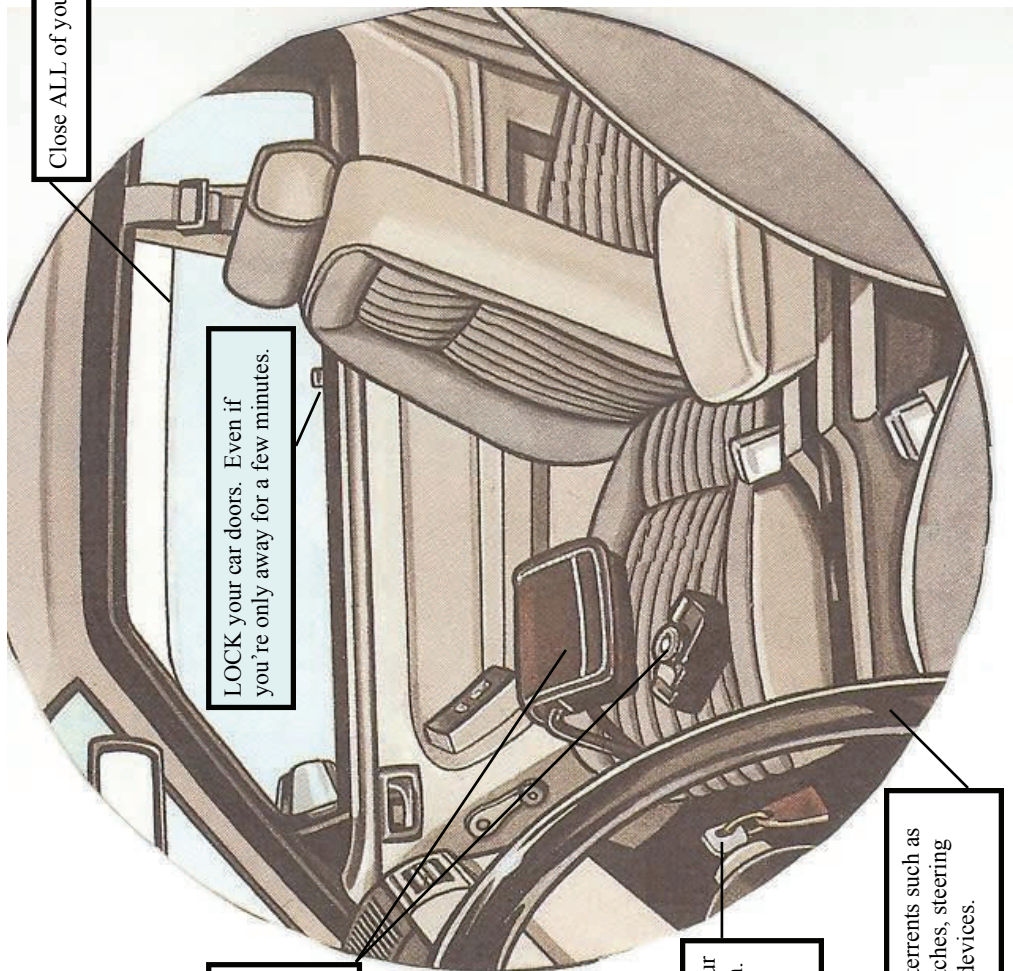
- ▶ *be safe. By practicing the suggested crime*
- ▶ *prevention tips you can help reduce the*
- ▶ *chances that you will become the victim of a*
- ▶ *burglary of a motor vehicle.*

You can take an active role in reducing the crime in our city by securing any property in your vehicle where thieves cannot see it, taking your keys with you, and locking your car doors.

- **BE AWARE** of your surroundings at ALL times.
- **PARK ONLY** in well-lighted areas and in high traffic areas of a parking lot.
- **REMOVE** all interior valuables/packages from plain view (preferably prior to reaching your destination). Lock these items in the trunk. These items often encourage a theft.
- **DO NOT** leave any articles of value in your car unattended, especially overnight (cell phones, laptops, money, wallet, purse).
- **LOCK** all doors and roll up all windows. Whether you leave your vehicle for a minute or several hours, secure your belongings, lock your car and take your keys.
- **USE AUTO THEFT DETERRENTS** such as car alarms, kill switches, steering wheel and column devices.
- **PARK** your vehicle in your garage when at home.
- **PURCHASE** stereo or television equipment that can be removed and placed out of sight.
- **CARRY YOUR REGISTRATION** with you. Don't leave any personal identification documents, keys or credit cards anywhere in the vehicle.
- **IF YOU NOTICE** anyone acting suspicious or hanging around the parking lot, return to the business and notify the management or call the police at 713-884-3131.

Burglary of a motor vehicle is most often a crime of opportunity. If you take away the opportunity, you reduce the chance of being a victim. Most thieves won't gamble with breaking into a vehicle where they may walk away empty handed. Remember, they're looking for a sure thing. In the majority of these cases, property can be seen by looking into your vehicle.

**BURGLARY OF MOTOR VEHICLE PREVENTION TIPS**  
**DID YOU FOLLOW THESE TIPS BEFORE LEAVING YOUR VEHICLE UNATTENDED**



Close ALL of your windows.

LOCK your car doors. Even if you're only away for a few minutes.

DO NOT leave any valuables or packages in plain view or unsecured.

DO NOT leave your keys in the ignition. Always take them with you.

Use Auto Theft Deterrents such as car alarms, kill switches, steering wheel and column devices.

PARK ONLY in well-lighted areas of a parking lot.

# IDENTITY THEFT

*Identity Theft is a common term used for all types of crime in which someone wrongfully obtains and uses another persons personal data in some manner that involved fraud or deception, usually for economic gain. Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in America.*

## How Identity Theft is Committed

- **Shoulder Surfing** - Watching you punch in telephone calling card, credit card, ATM numbers.
- **Business Record Theft** - Stealing personal files from businesses or institutions where you are a customer, patient, employee etc.
- **Scamming** - Posing as a legitimate company or government agency to obtain your personal information. This often happens through e-mail.
- **Phone Fraud** - Establishing cellular phone service in someone else's name.
- **Skimming** - Stealing credit and debit card numbers as the card is being scanned/processed to pay for a purchase, using a special data collection device known as a “skimmer”.
- **Dumpster Diving** - Going through your trash or the trash of businesses to obtain copies of checks, credit card/bank statements or other records.
- **Mail Theft** - Stealing mail to get new credit cards, bank or credit card statements, tax information as well as falsifying change of address information.
- **Steal Wallet or Purse** - Obtaining personal information from the theft of your purse or wallet.
- **The Information Highway** - Obtaining information that you share over the Internet.
- **Spoofing and Phishing** - When thieves set up look-alike websites of legitimate businesses and trick consumers into entering their personal information by sending e-mail messages that warn them that their account is about to expire or has been accessed illegally.

## Warning Signs Of Identity Theft

- Your monthly credit card and bank statements suddenly stop arriving.
- You are denied credit for reasons that do not match your understanding of your financial position.
- You start getting bills from companies you do not recognize.
- You receive calls from collection agencies or creditors for an account you don't have or that is up to date.
- You observe unusual entries on your credit report.
- Financial account statements show withdrawals you didn't make.
- A creditor calls to say you've been approved or denied credit that you haven't applied for. Or, you get credit card statements for accounts you don't have.

# Identity Theft continued...

## Preventing Identity Theft

- Guard your Social Security number. Remember this is the most important step. This is the key to your credit report and banking accounts. Give it out only when it is absolutely necessary.
- Minimize the amount of personal financial information and credit cards you carry. Memorize passwords and PINs instead of carrying them with you.
- Keep personal financial information in a secure place in your home. Shred identifying information before throwing it away.
- DO NOT give sensitive information to unsolicited callers. Remember that most legitimate businesses will not ask for your Social Security or bank account numbers.
- Shield your hand when entering your PIN at a bank ATM or when making long distance calls with a calling card. Take your credit card receipts and ATM slips. Shred them before throwing them away.
- Pick up new checks or a new or reissued credit card at your bank rather than having them delivered to your home. Do not have your driver's license number or social security number printed on your checks.
- Check your credit report each year for signs of unusual activity.
- Limit the exposure of your Social Security number and personal information by giving it only when it is absolutely necessary.
- DO NOT give personal information over the phone, over the Internet or through the mail unless you initiated the contact or are certain of the business' trustworthiness.
- Keep duplicate records of your wallet's contents.
- Mail payments from a safe location. Do not place them in your mailbox where they can be stolen.

If your bank or credit card statement does not arrive on time, call the issuer to make sure they are being sent to the proper address. Also contact the Post Office to see if a change of address has been filed in your name. A thief may steal or divert your statements to hide illegal activity.

## If You Have Been The Victim Of Identity Theft

- **Contact the Houston Police Department immediately: 713-884-3131**
- **Contact the following credit reporting agencies:**
  - Trans Union 1-800-680-7289 [www.tuc.com](http://www.tuc.com)
  - CSC Fraud 1-800-272-9281 [www.csccredit.com](http://www.csccredit.com)
  - Equifax 1-800-525-6285 [www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)
  - Experian 1-888-397-3742 [www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)
- **Contact the Federal Trade Commission 1-877-IDTHEFT**
- **Review your Credit Report**

The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) requires each of the nationwide consumer reporting companies to provide you with a free copy of your credit report, at your request, once every 12 months.

# **ROBBERY PREVENTION FOR BUSINESSES**

## **Stay Alert**

- Know who is in your business and where they are.
- Be suspicious of people wearing inappropriate clothing for the weather.
- Be aware of suspicious activity outside of your business especially at opening and closing times.
- Write down license plate numbers of suspicious vehicles if visible from inside your business.

## **Physical Deterrents**

- Keep your business well lit, especially at the entrances and exits.
- Maintain visibility throughout the business. Make sure signs and displays do not obstruct the view of the customer service area from the street.
- Mark the edge of the main doorway at varying heights to help identify the height of a robber.
- Keep cash at a minimum, and post notices in the doorway of this fact.
- Consider the installation of video cameras and/or alarm systems.

## **Bank Deposit Procedures**

- Avoid wearing name tags or clothing advertising your business.
- When carrying large amounts of cash, use police/armed guard protection.
- Try to make deposits during daylight hours.
- At least two employees should make the deposit.
- Go directly to the bank. Do not make other stops along the way.
- Use various various routes and times.
- Inform your business when you arrive as well as when you leave the bank.
- Vary the vehicles and personnel used if possible.
- Be aware of any vehicle that may be following you.
- Never leave the deposit unattended in the vehicle.
- If you pick up cash from the bank, follow the same procedures while returning to your business.

# Robbery Prevention for Businesses continued.....

## Opening and Closing Procedures

- Have at least two employees present when opening and closing the business.
- Upon arrival at the business, look around the building for suspicious persons or vehicles as well as possible break-ins.
- At closing, have all areas inside business check to make sure no one is hiding inside.
- DO NOT open the door to anyone after business hours.

**Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Employees are sometimes followed to their business or to their homes by robbers. Certain safety precautions should be followed regarding vehicles and home safety. Be observant of vehicles following you.**

**Know where police and fire stations are in your area. These are places of safety, should you suspect you are being followed. Write down the license plate of any suspicious vehicles. It is better to throw it away because you do not need it than to wish you had it later.**

## Planning for a Robbery

Although this is something that no person should ever have to experience, it is better to be prepared. The main objective should be to survive the robbery.

- Do not argue or fight with the robber. Any amount of money is not worth personal injury.
- Listen to your own instincts. If something seems wrong about a situation or a person, it probably is.
- Mentally review as often as possible the actions you should take if confronted with an emergency so that it becomes “second nature.”
- Keep a spare key in any room in which an employee may be locked after a robbery and keep a hidden phone for such an emergency.
- Keep the telephone number of the police near the phone.
- Actively participate in all training sessions offered to become thoroughly familiar with company policies and procedures.

Have regular safety meetings to develop and discuss you “Plan.” Some element of a good plan include:

- Employee demeanor during a robbery (do not resist)
- How to notify police.
- An escape route
- How to obtain a suspect’s description and/or vehicle information.
- Have prearranged signals between employees.
- How to activate an alarm.
- When not to activate an alarm.

# **Robbery Prevention for Businesses continued.....**

## **What To Do During a Robbery**

DO NOT argue or fight with the robber. Any amount of money or valuables is not worth personal injury to you.

Follow the robber's directions, but do not volunteer more than asked for.

If you have to move or reach, tell the robber what you are going to do and why. Assure the robber that you will cooperate.

Make mental notes of:

- The robber's race, age, height, sex, clothing, complexion, hair, eye color, etc.
- Anything unusual about the robber such as scars or tattoos.
- The number of accomplices and how they left the scene, direction of travel, type and color of vehicle. Get the license number if you can safely do so.
- Any conversations the suspects may have with one another.
- What the suspect's weapon looked like so you can describe it later.
- Also, try to remember what the suspect touches so that fingerprints may be lifted.

## **After the Robbery**

- Call the police, 9-1-1, immediately.
- Lock all doors and ask all witnesses to remain until the officers arrive. If a witness must leave, obtain his/her name, address and telephone number to give to officers.
- All witnesses should write down a description of all the suspects. Do not discuss the robbery or compare notes about the robber's appearance.
- Protect the crime scene. Do not touch anything.

# Houston Police Department

## Divisions

Central Division 61 Riesner Street	713-247-4400
Clear Lake Division 2855 Bay Area Boulevard	281-218-3800
Eastside Division 7525 Sherman	713-928-4600
Fondren Division 11168 Fondren	713-773-7900
Kingwood Division 3915 Rustic Wood Drive	281-913-4500
Mid West Division 3203 South Dairy Ashford	281-597-6000
North Division 9455 West Montgomery	281-405-5300
Northeast Division 8301 Ley Road	713-635-0200
Northwest Division 6000 Teague Road	713-744-0900
South Central Division 2202 St. Emanuel	832-394-0200
Southeast Division 8300 Mykawa	713-731-5000
Southwest Division 4503 Beechnut	713-314-3900
Westside Division 3203 South Dairy Ashford	281-584-4700