Personal Safety Tips

Virtually all activities in life entail some level of risk, and we all have different attitudes toward risk. At one end of the scale is refusing to engage in an activity by exaggerating the level of risk involved. At the other end is engaging in very risky activities while refusing to take any precautions. Neither of these attitudes is useful for living an empowered life. What is useful is to accurately assess the risks, take those precautions that make sense, and live as fully as possible.

In Your Home or Apartment
- Have lights at all entrances.
- Have a wide-angle door viewer on all exterior doors.
- Have good locks on all doors and windows, - and use them!
- Do not use your full name on your mailbox, in the telephone directory, or on your answering machine.
- Do not leave a schedule of your times away from home on your answering machine.
- Know which of your neighbors you can trust and depend upon in an emergency.
- Check who is at the door before opening it, and do not open the door to an unexpected visitor.
- Do not hide extra keys in easily accessible places. Criminals will find them.
- Ask for photo identification of all repair persons. If you are suspicious, call to verify employment.
- Never give personal information to telephone solicitors.
- Consider creating a “safe room” with a separate telephone line or cellular phone and strong locks. If someone breaks in, you can retreat there and call for help.
- Do not let strangers into your home or apartment to use the telephone. Offer to make the call for them.
- Use security bars for added security on sliding exterior doors.

On the Street
- Never hitchhike! It is not worth the risk!
- Be very careful using outside ATM’s at night or in unfamiliar surroundings.
- When walking, walk in the middle of the sidewalk, and walk facing oncoming traffic.
- Try not to overload yourself with packages or other items. Keep your hands as free as possible.
- Do not wear music headphones while walking or jogging.
- Do not read while walking or standing on a sidewalk.
- If you wear a purse with a shoulder strap, be prepared to let it go if it is snatched; otherwise, you could be knocked down and hurt.
- Carry a second wallet containing a few dollar bills and old expired credit cards which are normally destroyed or discarded. If confronted at knife or gun point, give the suspect the second wallet and concentrate on a good physical description to help the police in making the arrest.
- Avoid being on the street alone if you are upset or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- If you carry a purse, carry it close to your body, preferably in front. Carry no more money or credit cards than you absolutely need.

In a Car
- Keep your car in good working order and your gas tank at least half full.
- When you approach your parked vehicle, visually check the area around the vehicle for any suspicious persons or activity. If you observe anything suspicious, walk to where there are other people, and call the police.
- Always park in visible, well-lit areas.
- If you drive a car, attempt to avoid parking next to a larger pickup truck or van. They can be easy to hide behind.
- Have your keys ready when approaching your vehicle to reduce the time needed to enter.
- When operating your vehicle, keep the doors locked and the windows rolled up.
- Drive with all the doors locked.
- Any valuables in your car should be placed in the trunk or otherwise kept out of sight.
- Exercise extra caution when using underground and enclosed parking garages. Try not to go alone.
- When stopped at traffic lights or in traffic, allow space between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you so you can drive away if necessary.
- If someone approaches your vehicle and attempts to enter, blow your horn to attract attention, and drive away.
Many people consider a cellular telephone to be a good investment in safety. Program ICE into your phone so that an emergency contact is accessible to emergency personnel in the event you are incapacitated. Program 911 and your local and state emergency numbers, such as Louisiana State Police, *LSP.

- Do not pick up hitchhikers!
- Do not open your window if someone approaches your vehicle to ask for directions, the time, etc. Keep the door locked.
- Never leave house keys attached to car keys at service stations or parking facilities.
- Do not stop for a stranded motorist. Instead, use your cell phone or go to the nearest telephone booth, and call the police for assistance.
- If you have a flat tire, drive on it until you reach a safe, will-lit and well-traveled area.
- If your vehicle becomes disabled, and help is not immediately available, raise the hood of the vehicle (if you can safely do so), attach a handkerchief to the door handle, and then stay in the vehicle with the doors locked and the windows up. Activate your hazard or parking lights. If someone stops to assist you, ask them through the closed window to call the police.
- Criminals sometimes stage a motor vehicle accident. The motorist is robbed when he/she exits his/her vehicle. If you are involved in a minor accident under suspicious circumstances, stay in your vehicle with the doors locked and the windows up, and await the police. If you believe you are in possible danger, write down the license plate of the other vehicle involved in the accident, and drive to a safe location to report the accident to the police.
- If you are being followed, do not drive home. Go to the nearest police or fire station, and honk your horn, or drive to an open gas station or other business where you can safely call the police. Do not leave your car unless you are certain you can get inside the building safely.
- Carry the following items in your vehicle: flashlight; fix-a-flat; maps; comfortable warm clothing; portable fire extinguisher; first aid kit; empty gas can; white cloth to tie to door handle or antenna to signal distress; and a cellular telephone.
- If you are driving somewhere that is not familiar, plan your route, and check a map before you start out.

**On Public Transportation**

- Beware of overheard conversations. Do not tell anyone on a bus or subway where you are going.
- Stay awake and alert.
- Have exact change ready.
- Sit as close to the driver as possible.
- If you sense someone is following you when you get off, walk toward other people or to an open business.

**In a Building**

- Avoid isolated corridors or hallways.
- Be extra careful in stairwells and isolated or poorly-lit restrooms.
- Avoid entering an elevator which is occupied by only one other person who is a stranger.
- In an elevator, stand near the controls, and locate the emergency button.
- If you are assaulted while in an elevator, hit the emergency or alarm button, and press as many floor buttons as possible.