



We wish you a Happy Christmas and Crime Free New Year

Yes Christmas is almost upon us and a chance to celebrate with family and friends.

However, criminals also like to celebrate in a rather different way! This can be through on-line scams or property theft.

This article is therefore “My take” on some crimes that maybe more prevalent at this time of the year, how through simple measures the risks can be reduced, therefore ensuring we all have a safe and crime free Christmas.

There are an increasingly number of on-line scams and unfortunately many people fall for these. Our “Good tidings” are however that most of these can be avoided. After all, Christmas can be an expensive time and the last thing we want, is to lose money through a scam or any crime. So let’s deal with scams first.

On line shopping fraud

Unfortunately not everything on Facebook and other social media is true! There is temptation to respond immediately to posts, and this applies to offers of goods and services. Remember if it appears too good to be true then it usually is! Take time to check out the offer.

If possible use online retailers/brands you are aware of and trust. For major brands always go to their official website to find a list of authorised sellers. Having selected your retailer then check the delivery, insurance, warranty and returns policy. Ensure you have adequate anti-virus software that will enable your computer to flag any untrustworthy sites.

Fake parcel delivery scams

In the lead up to Christmas we are already seeing an increase in on-line parcel delivery scams using the names of well-known couriers such as DHL. If you are expecting a delivery be particularly careful. Do not click on any links in emails, open attachments or reply. These are either phishing emails where the fraudster is attempting to gain your personal information or means of inserting a virus into your computer. Simply delete the email. If in doubt check with the company concerned but not using the contact details in the email.

Mobile payments

There are an increasing number of services such as banking services available through your mobile device. The number of attacks on mobile phones are now almost exceeding that of computers. Sound advice is not to store or save passwords or personal/financial data on your mobile device unless it is absolutely necessary and make sure the phone is passcode protected.

If stolen, most mobile devices have the software to wipe all data from their memory remotely - learn how this works. Do not leave your Bluetooth on as cyber-criminals can hack into your device unnoticed. Also install anti-virus software and check the security features.

Donating to charity

Unfortunately the number of fake charity scams are increasing tugging on your heart strings at this time of the year. Never click on a hyperlink in an email purportedly from a charity. Instead visit the charity's website first by typing the address into your browser.

Before you donate, check the website you are on is secure - the web address should begin with https:// (the "s" stands for "secure") and look for the padlock symbol. It is very risky to respond to requests to donate through a money transfer company such as Western Union or MoneyGram.

Property crime

Let's now turn to what I will describe as property crimes. Although crimes such as theft from vehicles and burglaries have shown downward trends in recent years, they are still relatively common and may increase at this time of the year; so it's best to be aware.

Security of valuable items

Going Christmas shopping? Don't leave valuables and gifts on display in your car. Theft of items from cars is one of the largest crimes in Portugal. Valuable items such as electronic goods and TVs etc are sought after items by criminals, so make sure that they are not left on display.

In 2017 there was a significant increase in opportunity theft, favourite items being mobile phones and handbag. Much of this is down to carelessness by not looking after one's property. Be particularly aware at Christmas markets and crowded stores when shopping, as not all of those around you are sharing the same Christmas spirit of "Goodwill to all"

Distraction Crime

We have received several reports this year of distraction crime mainly in supermarket car parks. Distraction crime usually involves two or more culprits, but can be one. The modus operandi is to distract you and whilst distracted your property is stolen. Although often in car parks it can be in street or in coffee shop terraces. Shopping trolleys may more loaded with attractive goods in the lead up to Christmas, so please be vigilant to this type of crime.

Late night out and drink driving

Attending a Christmas party? Some useful tips to help you have an enjoyable time out include: Drink water and a snack before you go out and between alcoholic drinks during the night as it will reduce the effect of the alcohol on your body. When walking home if you are under the influence of alcohol it is best to be accompanied by friends. Alternatively use a taxi or if available public transport. Do not get in car with someone who has been drinking. Remember in Portugal that drinking and driving at 0.5 g/l and above is against the law and at 1.2 g/l or above, a criminal offence. If you have been driving for less than 3 years then it is 0.3 g/l and above.

I know it is awful at this time of year to even have to think about these matters; but we live in a real world and unfortunately there are those who take advantage at this time of year to carry out such crimes.

Safe Communities Portugal wish you all a Very Happy and Safe Christmas and New Year.

David Thomas

President Safe Communities Portugal 7th December 2018