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Malls, authorities raise security for holiday shopping

As if cell phones weren't handy enough, police are advising shoppers to use the ubiquitous devices as crime-fighting tools this holiday season.

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File Photo

In anticipation of the holiday shopping season, Gwinnett CID officials are ramping up officer presence with private security in addition to usual police patrols.

LAWRENCEVILLE — As if cell phones weren't handy enough, police are advising shoppers to use the ubiquitous devices as crime-fighting tools this holiday season.

How so?

Astute shoppers will snap a cell phone photo of the serial number on the boxes of high-dollar items before leaving the store, said Gwinnett police spokesman Cpl. Edwin Ritter.

“That way (the number) can be readily furnished to police” should the item be stolen, Ritter said.

On the eve of Black Friday, shopper security is the topic du jour. Mall officials and police balk at releasing percentages of enforcement increases during the holidays, but extra patrols are promised in malls, parking lots and along Gwinnett's busiest commercial corridors.

Gwinnett police will activate the Holiday Task Force from Black Friday to Dec. 31 to bolster police presence in high-volume retail shopping areas. These include Gwinnett's three major malls, the Hamilton Mill/Interstate 85 corridor, Stone Mountain Highway and the Scenic Highway corridor, said Ritter.

Shelley Korenbrot, Director of Marketing and Business Development at Gwinnett Place Mall, said mall security will be adjusted to accommodate an influx of shoppers and extended mall hours.

“The safety and security of our shoppers and employees is our top priority,” she said.

Earlier this month, Gwinnett Place CID officials announced they've hired private security for the first time to bolster local police efforts this shopping season. CID officials paid \$15,625, or about \$25 per hour, for the service, which will end in January.

Ritter, the police spokesman, said safety road checks will be manned by traffic and DUI units at various times and locations.

“The task force will utilize every resource available, with all efforts being aimed at making our citizens safer,” he said.

Police and mall officials remind shoppers the most effective crime deterrent is alertness. Unscrupulous people lurk whenever mass commercial transactions ensue.

Officials offer these holiday-centric pointers to keep in mind:

- Store packages in the trunk, or conceal them thoroughly;
- Deliver merchandise to a secure location as soon as possible;
- If traveling, secure the home; designate a neighbor to remove newspapers from driveways, and to retrieve mail;
- Park in well-lit areas at shopping centers;
- Keep purses closed and secure; never set them down;
- Look inside and under vehicles before entering; lock doors promptly;
- Shop in groups of at least two;
- Don't carry large amounts of cash;
- Don't announce travel plans on answering machines or social networking sites.

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