



The Association of Scottish Neighbourhood Watches

HANDBAG SECURITY



These guidelines were initially produced by New Zealand Police, but are equally applicable across the world.

Primarily seen as advice for women on practices that can be adopted to reduce the risks of a handbag being snatched by a thief, the advice can equally apply to any person carrying a briefcase, laptop computer or other item.

Being alert and following the tips outlined in these guidelines will minimise the opportunities for theft and the risks of becoming a victim.

OUT AND ABOUT

- A thief will look for a person who presents a visual image of an easy target.
- A thief's attention will be drawn to someone carrying a handbag in a position from which it can be easily snatched, particularly if that person seems oblivious of the surroundings, and is walking in a manner that lacks confidence.
- Displaying alertness, walking upright and briskly with a handbag firmly held in a secure position, conveys a positive body language, and reduces the risk of becoming a victim.
- Consider carrying your handbag firmly under an arm, or in front, so that it cannot be suddenly snatched from behind. Take into account that if you wrap a handbag strap around your arm, an injury could be sustained if the handbag is forcibly snatched.
- If within close proximity to moving vehicles, hold your handbag so that it is facing away from passing traffic. This will deny the opportunity for any cyclist, motorcyclist or occupant of a motor vehicle to snatch your handbag.
- Try to avoid walking in isolated areas that provide an opportunity for crime. Thieves favour locations offering cover and places of concealment where their activities are unlikely to be observed by others.
- It can be a sensible practice to keep your charge cards, credit cards and keys separate from your handbag. This will avoid difficulties should you be unfortunate enough to have your handbag stolen.
- Modern handbags have inside pockets for mobile phones. You should consider keeping your mobile phone separate from your handbag so that, in the unfortunate event that your handbag is stolen, you will have your mobile phone available to contact the Police and your Bank.
- Be wary of any person who may seek to distract you. If you are suspicious of any person's intentions, move your handbag into a position from which it cannot be easily seized. Displaying a confident manner acts as a deterrent.
- If you see anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable, maintain a good distance to reduce the risk of your handbag being snatched.

USING A VEHICLE

- Always keep your doors locked when travelling by motor vehicle. This will prevent anyone from opening a door and removing your handbag. This type of crime has been happening in cities at road junctions and pedestrian crossings controlled by traffic lights.
- If you place your handbag on a seat, this could make it more visible and attract attention. Keeping it on the floor is better for security.
- When driving into a carpark try and avoid parking in an isolated position which cannot be well observed by other users. Parking in busy areas reduces the opportunity for theft.
- Before exiting your vehicle, look around for any persons who may be loitering nearby. If you see anyone who looks suspicious drive away and park in a different location.
- Never leave your handbag or other valuables in an unattended vehicle, they could be stolen, and

thieves will look for any property that may have been hidden.

- When walking through a carpark be alert to your surroundings and proximity of persons behind you or approaching from the sides or rear.
- If anyone moving towards you makes you feel uncomfortable, change course and increase pace in a safe direction.
- If you feel uncomfortable walking through a carpark it can be a good idea to keep close to any persons going in your direction who you perceive are not a risk to you.
- On returning to your vehicle it can be a good idea to have your car keys in your hand, so you are not distracted retrieving them once you reach your vehicle.
- Be alert to any persons close by, or occupants of any vehicle in the immediate vicinity, who may appear to be watching you.
- Consider that if you unlock the vehicle and put your handbag on a passenger seat whilst getting into the drivers seat a thief could open the door and remove your handbag.
- Holding onto your handbag and not putting it down until you are fully inside and have locked all the doors will reduce the risk of it being stolen.
- Your attention could be diverted from your handbag when placing shopping in the boot. If possible, for security, open the passenger compartment first, place your handbag on the floor (or under the seat) then immediately lock all the doors before attending to your shopping.
- When travelling on public transport retain a hold on your handbag rather than leaving it on a seat, underneath, or in the overhead rack.

ATM MACHINES

- Thieves may monitor ATM machines looking for people withdrawing large amounts of cash. To avoid attracting undesirable attention, it's sensible to withdraw only small amounts at any one time.
- When withdrawing cash, shield your PIN number and be alert to any persons watching you. Avoid giving the impression of an easy target, by standing in a position that provides a view of what's happening around you.
- Put your money away promptly and if you have to use an ATM at night try and find one in an area that is well illuminated and not isolated.
- A busy location with the presence of people will reduce the risks of theft occurring. If however you notice someone loitering nearby, or watching the ATM from a vehicle, it may be a good idea to use a machine elsewhere.
- Be particularly alert after using an ATM machine of any person who may follow you. If you think you are being followed go immediately to a place where there are people. You may consider telephoning the police as this may be an ongoing problem.

PUBLIC TELEPHONES

- When using public telephones or engaged in any activity that can lower awareness of your surroundings, turning and facing people passing sends a clear message that you are alert and denies a thief the opportunity to approach unnoticed.

BARS, RESTAURANTS AND CLUBS

- It is not advisable to leave a handbag unattended, particularly at a crowded venue. If you are going out onto a dance-floor or leaving your handbag unattended for any reason, have someone you trust look after it.
- If using a public toilet be careful where you place your handbag. Do not place it down close to the door if there is a gap between the bottom of the door and the ground. Thieves have been known to reach under doors into cubicles and snatch handbags away.
- Be wary of placing a handbag under a seat or in any position from which you cannot observe it. If out of sight, the bag or its contents could be stolen. This would also apply at other venues such as concerts, sports events and cinemas.
- It pays to be cautious of someone you may have just met, particularly in the club environment. Consider that if you are inattentive someone with you could slip drugs into your bag. This would enable a drug user or dealer to use you as a carrier. In any situation involving a Police Stop or Search, you would be placed in a difficult position.

BUS AND FERRY TERMINALS, RAILWAY STATIONS AND AIRPORTS

- It pays to be alert in paces of public transit. Inattention whilst placing a handbag down and dealing with tickets or other matters could result in the handbag being stolen.
- Maintain a hold of your handbag or place it directly in front of you if dealing with tickets at a counter. Keeping your handbag insight at all times reduces the risk of it being stolen.
- The presence of pickpockets should not be discounted. It makes sense to hold a handbag in a manner that would prevent a thief from opening a zip or clasp and removing a purse.
- If security is not practised and a handbag is stolen, a thief could obtain an address and keys to a home. Apart from the risks to safety which could arise, any personal information contained in the handbag could be used for identity theft.

SHOPPING TROLLEYS

- When using a shopping trolley at a supermarket or elsewhere, if possible secure the handbag to the trolley using any straps available.
- Avoid leaving your purse loose in the trolley, on top of your handbag, or your handbag clasp or zip open with your purse visible inside.
- Do not leave your trolley unattended with your handbag or purse in it.

THE WORKPLACE

- In shops or office one thief may distract a Receptionist, or Customer Services Representative, whilst an accomplice commits the theft. Other situations may involve a person gaining unauthorised access to internal areas and removing handbags from unoccupied offices or meal rooms.
- At work handbags should either be under observation, locked in a safe place, or held in a secure location where unauthorised persons cannot gain access.
- Businesses may require regular banking, and guidelines have been produced on safe practices for cash conveyance. Do not use your handbag and consult your local Community Constable, Crime Prevention Officer or Community Safety Officer for advice if you are asked to undertake this function.

AT HOME

- The main problems at home are those associated with bogus callers, sneak thieves and bogus workmen. Some householders have left the front of their homes insecure when engaged in gardening BBQ's or other activities at the rear of the house. Thieves are given easy access and have stolen handbag contents.
- At times thieves have gained access to an insecure bedroom whilst householders have been having a meal or watching television in another part of the house. Thieves target bedrooms for handbags and jewellery.
- One of two persons may knock at the door and make an excuse to gain entry such as asking to use the telephone. Whilst the householder is distracted, the accomplice will look for a handbag and quickly steal the contents.
- When at home adopting basic security practices to prevent thieves from entering will safeguard handbags and other property

HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS

- Leaving a handbag in a locked hotel or motel room does not guarantee property security. Thieves may gain entry through motel windows and there can also be the risk of thefts by staff in some establishments.
- If available an in-room safe should be used or property lodged in a safe at reception. Where such facilities do not exist, valuables should be carried with you.
- Insecure ground floor windows can pose a security risk, When sleeping at night, keep handbags away from windows and out of reach. At higher levels access could be attempted via adjoining balconies. It makes sense to keep windows secured.

RESPONDING TO THEFT

- If you think someone is about to snatch your handbag, talk loudly and assertively, using words like **"go away "** **"I'll call the police"**. Displaying a firm and confident manner in confronting a potential thief may prevent an offence from being committed.
- It is a natural reaction to try and protect property but consider that, if your handbag is seized and you put up resistance, you could be assaulted or seriously injured during a struggle.
- If your handbag is stolen, yell out loudly **"Stop Thief"** or similar to attract attention. Activate a personal alarm if you are carrying one.
- Personal alarms which can be attached to a handbag are available. The noisy part stays with the bag and may force the thief to abandon the handbag before having time to remove the contents.
- It can be a good idea to carry a mobile phone separate from your handbag to prevent theft. If your handbag is stolen, immediately telephone the Police providing a description of the thief, direction of travel and details of any vehicle used, particularly the registration number if known.
- If you have Debit or Credit Cards stolen notify the Bank or Credit Card Company as soon as possible. Never keep a written record of your PIN numbers with your cards or in your handbag.
- If you have left your Bank cards in your handbag you could receive a telephone call from a person claiming to be from the Bank, Credit Card Company or the Police requesting your PIN number for cancellation or other action to be taken.

Under no circumstances will you receive a call from any of these agencies requesting a PIN number. Do not divulge it.

- Whilst most handbag thefts are committed by young males, it is good practice not to let your guard down as a potential thief could be female.