Don't Be Conned

According to the American Association of Retired Persons, older citizens are victims of fraudulent schemes far out of proportion to their population numbers. Keep informed about the latest con schemes in your community by reading the newspaper. Be skeptical about any proposal that sounds too good to be true or has to be kept secret. Don't rush into anything. Check it out with friends, lawyers, the police department, Better Business Bureau, and your state or county consumer affairs department.

Be especially wary of:

- "Get rich quick" schemes for which you have to put up "good faith" money.
- "Good deals" on expensive repair or home improvement jobs.
- Investments that promise unusually large returns.
- Someone claiming you owe money for an item ordered by a deceased spouse or relative.
- Work at home schemes, door-to-door sales, supplemental medicare insurance, miracle cures, glasses and hearing aids at bargain prices.

If you are the victim of fraud, call the police immediately. You may be embarrassed because you were tricked, but your information is vital in catching the con artist and preventing others from being victimized.

Take Action — Today!

Staying active in your community will help you to feel safer, and help to make your neighborhood a better place to live.

- Join a Neighborhood, Apartment, or Window Watch, or Citizen Patrol.
- Become a foster grandparent or block parent for children who may need help in an emergency.
- If a friend has been a victim of crime, be supportive. Listen carefully and nonjudgementally, cook a meal, help repair damage or replace belongings. Accompany the victim to the police station and to court.
- Volunteer for a local Court Watch to help make courts more responsive to citizen needs.
- Ask the crime prevention officer from your local law enforcement agency to talk to your senior citizens' group.

Crime Prevention tips from:

The National Crime Prevention Council
1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW
13th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

and

Missouri Crime Prevention Information Center
Department of Public Safety
301 W. High Street, Room 870
P.O. Box 749
Jefferson City, MO 65102
(573) 751-4905

Help me, McGruff

TAKE A BITE OUT OF CRIME®

Senior Citizens Against Crime

Take these tips from me, McGruff, and be my partner for a safe community.

Crime prevention is everyone's responsibility, not just a job for the police. And crime can be reduced by simple measures like remembering to lock a door, knowing about common con games, and watching out for your neighborhood.

Although surveys consistently show that persons over 65 are victims of crime far less frequently than young people, many senior citizens are so worried about crime that they shut themselves up in their homes and rarely go out. But isolating ourselves behind locked doors, not getting together with our neighbors, actually makes it easier for criminals to work in the neighborhood.

Seniors are more vulnerable to certain crimes — purse snatching, mugging, and fraud. But you can reduce opportunities for criminals to strike by being careful, alert, and a good neighbor.

When You're Out

- If you must carry a purse, hold it close to your body. Don't dangle it.
- Never carry a wallet in your back pocket. Put it in an inside jacket pocket or front pocket.
- Make sure someone knows where you're going and when you expect to return.
- Avoid dark, deserted routes, even if they're the shortest.
- Carry change for emergency telephone and transportation use.
- Whenever possible, travel with friends to stores, the bank, or the doctor. Check with your police or sheriff, or senior citizen center about escort services.
- When using the bus or other public transportation, sit near the driver if possible.
- Don't overburden yourself with packages and groceries that obstruct your view and make it hard to react.
- Have your car or house key in hand as you approach your vehicle or home.
- Carry a shriek alarm. In some areas, community groups offer free alarms to seniors.
- When you drive, keep doors locked and windows up. Park in well-lighted, busy areas. If you have car trouble, be wary of strangers who offer help. Stay in your car and ask them to call a service truck or the police.
- If a friend or a taxi takes you home, ask the driver to wait until you are safely inside.
- Communicate the message that you are calm, confident, and know where you are going. Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in a place or situation, leave.

When You Are At Home

- Use deadbolt locks on all exterior doors. Keep your doors locked at all times, even when you're inside.
- Protect windows and sliding glass doors with good locks or other security devices.
- Make your home appear occupied when you go out by using a timer to turn on lights and a radio.
- Never let strangers in your home without checking their identification. Call their company if you're not sure. Install a peephole in your door and use it.
- If you live alone, don't advertise it. Use only your first initial in phone books, directories, and apartment lobbies.

- Get to know your neighbors and keep their phone numbers handy for emergencies.
- Work out a "buddy" system with a friend to check on each other daily.
- Engrave your valuables with a unique identification number recommended by the police. Local youth groups may provide this service free to seniors. Keep bonds, stock certificates, seldom worn jewelry, and stamp and coin collections in a safe deposit box.
- Don't hide extra house keys under a doormat or other obvious spots.

Protect Your Money

- If you receive checks in the mail regularly, arrange for them to be sent directly to the bank instead.
- Avoid carrying large sums of money. If you must take a large sum, have a friend accompany you.
- Don't display large amounts of cash in stores or other public places.
- Don't sign a check or contract until you're sure it's for a legitimate reason and know the details. Check with a friend, lawyers, or police officer if in doubt.
- Never put your purse or wallet on a counter while you examine merchandise in a store.

What If You Are Assaulted?

- If the attacker is only after your purse or other valuables, don't resist. Your life and safety are worth more than your possessions.
- Make a conscious effort to get an accurate description of the attacker and call the police or sheriff immediately.
- Contact your local victim assistance agency to help you deal with the trauma that all crime victims experience. They can help you learn more about counseling, victim compensation laws and how to follow your case's progress.
- Start a crime prevention program in your building or neighborhood. Turn your tragedy into a helping experience for others.