

Safe and confident living for Queensland Seniors

by Inspector Tony Lake, QPS Office of the Commissioner

All Queenslanders have the right to feel safe and secure, whether in their own home or while participating in community activities.

Yet a fear of crime is preventing some seniors from living life to the full.

Contrary to common belief, seniors are relatively safe compared to other age groups. Young people are more likely to be victims of crime than other members of the community, and seniors are the least likely age group to be victimised.



The lifestyle of seniors helps make their lives safer - they are less likely to go out at night, tend to spend more time at home, and are generally wiser and more likely to take precautions.

However, emotive statements by public figures and the media's tendency to highlight offences against older people can result in a disproportionate fear of crime among seniors.

This unnecessary fear can lead to a lack of confidence about going out alone, whether it's on public transport or walking in the neighbourhood. It can also result in a decrease in quality of life, deterioration in health and social isolation.

People who are actively involved in their communities, however, tend to be more confident about their safety, have less fear of crime, and live longer.

In February 2004 the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, Judy Spence formed the Seniors Task Force in an effort to combat crime against seniors.

The first initiative of the Task Force is a seniors safety handbook, entitled "Confident, Safe and Secure – Living in Queensland. A Handbook on Safety for Seniors".

Ms Spence said the aim of the handbook was to dispel myths about crime and seniors, and provide practical, easy ways for seniors to help keep themselves safe when at home and out and about.

"This is the first initiative of the Seniors Task Force, which I set up when I became Minister for Police and Corrective Services," Ms Spence said.

"It is also the first time a crime prevention and safety handbook specifically for seniors has been produced in Queensland.

"The handbook includes tips on safety and security when out and about, safety and security at home, safety when on holidays, and information about services available to seniors.

"Elder abuse is also covered in the handbook, as is fraud awareness and some strategies to avoid becoming a victim of scams or shonky traders.

"Checklists feature throughout the handbook, covering such things as a home security assessment, property inventory, personal safety strategy and a checklist to ensure your property is secure while you are on holidays," Ms Spence said.

Some of the practical tips provided throughout the handbook include:

SAFETY AND SECURITY AT HOME

Securing Your Home

You don't need to spend lots of money on security. Simple and low-cost changes can make your

house look occupied and deter intruders.

The following suggestions are a guide to what can be done.

Outside security

- Make sure your house number is easy to see from the street.
- Trim bushes and trees that obscure windows.
- Consider removing bushes or trees that could be used as hiding places by intruders.
- Ensure that doorway and outside lighting will illuminate your yard.
- Consider installing sensor lights that turn on when you come home at night, and will deter prowlers.
- Keep ladders and tools locked in your garage, garden shed or under the house.

Doors

- External doors should be of solid core construction and fitted with deadlocks that can be opened from the inside without a key.
- A peephole in all external doors and a light outside allow you to see who is there, day and night, without having to open the door.
- A security chain between the door and the wall will help you

check who's at the door.

- Security doors offer valuable protection when your main door is open for ventilation.
- Keep security doors locked at all times.
- If your front door has glass panels, hang the key near the door, but out of reach of anyone who could smash a panel.

Windows

- Install quality key-operated window locks to all windows.
- Make sure all your window locks can be unlocked with the same key.
- If possible, replace louvre windows with sliding windows, or install security grilles over your louvres.
- Install security grilles to deter intruders so you can leave your windows open in hot weather.

Other tips

- When you buy new electrical goods, don't leave the packaging outside so burglars will know you have new products.
- Don't keep lots of money in your house unless it's in a good-quality safe.
- Don't leave keys hidden outside.



Property inventory

- Compile a detailed inventory of your property
- Record the serial numbers, makes, models, colour and size of your specific items.
- Keep the inventory in a safe place and update it when you get new property.

Property marking

- Marking your items clearly identifies them as your property.
- Property marking will deter burglars by making it difficult for them to dispose of your goods and help police return them to you.

Here are a few tips on how to identify your property

- Use an engraver to mark items on your inventory list. Engravers are available for loan from your nearest Neighbourhood Watch group, or contact your local police station.
- Some items can't be engraved, so take photographs or videotape items such as jewellery, watches, silverware, collectables, stamp and coin collections, furs, antiques, paintings and furniture.
- Mark your property with your driver's licence number with the letter 'Q' (for Queensland). If your driver's licence number is 12 345 678, mark your property with the code 'Q12345678'.
- Or mark your property with your initials, date of birth and the letter 'Q', eg, John Richard Smith was born on 01-02-65, so his personal code would be JRS010265Q.
- If you have marked property stolen, tell the police the code you have used.
- Stickers are available from Neighbourhood Watch to show your property has been marked - display these stickers

on your property and in prominent places.

Being safe at home

By using some of the following simple personal safety precautions, you can help minimise your risks at home.

When a visitor arrives

- Use your peephole, door chain or a window to see who's at the door before opening it.
- Check the credentials of charity workers and don't let them into your home.
- Always check the credentials of service repair people and sales people.
- Talk to these people through a locked security door. If you are unsure about a person's motives, ask for the name of their company and their identification card, then telephone the company to check their credentials.
- Ring your local police if their actions seem suspicious.

- If someone is at the door and you are alone and feeling insecure, pretend there is someone else in the house.
- Be discreet if you live alone. It is better not to indicate on unit or flat directories or nameplates whether you are Ms, Miss, Mrs or Mr. Just use your surname. In the phone book, use initials and surname only.

If there's an intruder

- If you arrive home and suspect an intruder is inside, DO NOT ENTER THE HOUSE. Go to a neighbour's house and call the police on triple zero (000). Keep out of sight and a safe distance from the house.
- If you see anyone leaving, try to remember what they look like and take a description of their car and its registration number.
- If you are at home and find an intruder on your property, you could:

- activate the burglar alarm
- get to the nearest phone (bedroom) and quietly call the police
- switch on lights and make a lot of noise moving about, but don't confront the intruder.
- If the intruder confronts you, try to stay calm, but shout and scream, especially if you believe this noise might be heard by a neighbour.

Launched during Crime Prevention Week 2004, *Confident, Safe and Secure* provides seniors with practical information and handy hints on personal and property security and will assist seniors to live life to the full and – most importantly – without fear.

The seniors safety handbook will be available through the Queensland Police Service, other government departments, seniors organisations and community groups.

