



# Middlesex Sheriff's Office

**Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian**  
400 Mystic Avenue, Medford, MA 02155  
office: 781-960-2800 fax: 781-960-2902  
[www.middlesexsheriff.com](http://www.middlesexsheriff.com)

## Wishing all a happy and safe holiday season

**By Peter J. Koutoujian**

The most wonderful season of the year is upon us; a time of joyous celebration with family, friends and loved ones. We want this season to remain a happy, healthy time for all of us and, here in Middlesex County, we're working to ensure that we do all we can to get important safety information out to our community.

The Middlesex Sheriff's Office has identified two areas of safety we want you to be especially aware of this time of year in order to keep your family safe: holiday shopping and home safety.

Holiday shopping safety is paramount this time of year as, despite the good will and giving of the season, there remains the sad reality that there are those who don't share those good intentions. A few basic tips to keep in mind when out holiday shopping:

- If visiting multiple stores, store your bags in the trunk of your car. If you must store them in the passenger compartment, make every effort to keep them out of sight.
- Be aware of loiterers near your vehicle. If you have any concerns, return to the store and ask to be escorted. Park your vehicle in a well-lit area that is populated by fellow shoppers.
- Consider using a credit card and not a debit card when shopping online. Federal law limits your liability to \$50 if your credit card is used fraudulently. Also, only carry the amount of cash you expect to use when shopping in stores as thieves are on the look-out for people holding large amounts of money.
- Consumers are typically in a generous mood and often distracted during the holidays. Be leery of strangers approaching you asking for something that may ordinarily raise suspicions. A favorite holiday scam involves someone approaching you in a parking lot with a gas can looking to "borrow" some money for gas. Mall or department store security is better equipped to handle stranded motorists.

In addition to keeping safety in mind while out tackling those holiday shopping lists, it's just as important to remember to put safety first at home. When it comes to holiday lights and trees, fire safety should always be a priority. Some things to keep in mind:

- Keep trees away from heat sources and be sure to water your tree daily.
- Never leave a lit tree unattended and use only fire retardant decorations.
- Use a "non-tip" style tree stand.
- Dispose of your tree properly, soon after the holidays, before the needles dry out.
- Never hang lights on a metallic tree.
- Check all lighting for frayed wires, broken plugs, and sockets and never overload outlets. Use no more than three strands of lights on a single extension cord.
- Never use candles on trees, near live or other flammable decorations, and be sure to never leave candles burning unattended.

- Consider buying new energy efficient LED lights that don't get as hot and always use appropriate weatherproof lights outdoors.
- Make sure grills and outdoor cookware are not used indoors.

By paying attention to the safety tips above, we can ensure a happy and healthy holiday season for our families, loved ones and neighbors. Enjoy this special time and, from all of us at the Middlesex Sheriff's Office, Happy Holidays!

*Peter J. Koutoujian is the Sheriff of Middlesex County*

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