

# Personal Safety and How to be a Good Witness

## **Personal Safety:**

When we think of personal safety as it relates to security in today's world, we must consider ways of making ourselves unfavorable targets for criminals. But how is this done?

Secure your belongings. Seward has always been a safe town with low crime. A lot of people here don't consider locking their doors, their cars, sheds etc. But today, this has changed. Due to the rise of drugs like methamphetamine and heroin in our community, people are willing to steal anything and everything to make money for their drug habit. While it is incredibly sad, it is our reality and we can fight this simply by being more aware and taking steps to protect our belongings.

Other things that you can do to help is using tools like good lighting inside and out, motion sensor lighting and video surveillance depending on your budget. Use quality padlocks and chain rather than rope when securing things.

The next thing you should consider is personal awareness. Police officers try to stay in a constant state of alertness. This isn't to be confused with actively searching for threats. This is a general state of knowing what's going on around you. Here's an example: Have you ever been driving down the road and later had a friend tell you they waved at you when you passed them, but you never saw them? This state of mind is not what we want. If you are passively alert, you should notice that friend waving because you're paying attention to what's around you. When a person is alert, others can tell and a person who is paying attention is a much harder target than someone who is

obviously lost in thought. Keep in mind, this is a learned skill! You must practice it to get good at it.

Third, A lot of people ask us about carrying firearms for security. It's safe to say that we in law enforcement see them as a double-edged sword. They can be a help if you are very proficient with them and understand the laws. But they can get you into a lot of trouble if you don't practice and "think" you know the laws. Consider this, in 17 years of law enforcement I have not had to fire my weapon. Conversely, I have had to physically fight numerous times. I recommend training in a martial art way more than picking up a firearm. Most criminals don't want to murder you. Plus, with a martial art you get the bonus of the physical exercise which is good for your health.

My final point on personal security might seem a bit out of place, but it needs to be said. When a person commits a crime in your business or at your residence, press charges. Too often here in Seward criminals get caught, red-handed or through investigation, only to have the victim decline to press charges. Isn't this just being nice, understanding and compassionate? Well, it is, but it's also creating an atmosphere of acceptance of criminal behavior. I can't tell you how many times I have seen the same person stealing all over town, getting caught every time, and then simply trespassed and sent on their way. Guess what? The victim is then victimizing their neighbor when the criminal goes there next! Let's not pass criminals off to each other. Instead, let's collectively say, "This isn't okay, and we aren't going to put up with it!" We, the people of this city, have the power to stop crime. But we must work together. The police department needs your help to make this town as safe as we can. If we work together, we can accomplish this task.

## **Being a good witness:**

So how can we be good witnesses? As mentioned above, a person must first be alert. But it goes beyond this. Now we must have an eye for details. Being a good witness is like working as a dispatcher.

Dispatchers are trained to find out Who, What, When, Why, Where and How. A good witness will do this as well. Who did it? What did they do? When did they do it? Why did they do it? Where did this happen? How was it done? The more information you can piece together the better. Try to really concentrate on the defining features of a person. These are things like tattoos, moles or birthmarks on their skin, scars etc. If there is a vehicle involved, getting the license plate is FAR more valuable than the description of "red Chevy pickup." The better the information, the more likely the police will catch the criminal. No matter if it's a person or a vehicle, try to remember the direction the suspect went and what time they left the area.

Use your technology. Nearly all of us today carry cell phones that have the capability of making video and taking pictures. Use this to your advantage. Your video and pictures can be sent via email to the police officer working on the case to help resolve it.

If something happens, if you're able and have time, write down what happened. Our memory fades over time and when we are stressed, we remember even less. So, if you can make some notes.

Finally, report what happened as soon as possible. It's incredibly frustrating to have someone call to tell us their stuff was stolen a week, a month, or (my personal favorite) some time ago. The sooner we can get to work for you, the sooner we can resolve the situation.