



TOWNSHIP OF HOPEWELL

Police Department

MERCER COUNTY

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Titusville, New Jersey 08560-1410

Recently, the Hopewell Valley and surrounding area has been experiencing "Distraction or Diversion Burglaries." It is the goal of Hopewell Township to inform our residents and try to minimize the success of these burglars. Please spread the word to your friends and neighbors, especially if they are elderly.

What are distraction burglars?

Distraction burglars normally work in pairs. Their aim is to distract you and trick their way into your home or lure you out of your home to steal your money or valuables.

They may knock at your door posing as officials, claiming to be from the council, market researchers, health care, gas, water, electric, phone or TV companies. Others may try a tactic of taking advantage of your good nature by saying they are collecting for charity, or they need something from your house such as water for their car, a pen and paper to leave a note for a neighbor, they want to retrieve a ball that has gone in your garden or need to use your phone.

They can also use a tactic of feigning urgency and panic - a typical ploy is where they say something like "We're from the Water Company; there is a burst pipe in the street and we need to come in and turn your water off immediately." There are many variations of this scheme, substituting gas as the leaking product or a power outage that needs immediate attention.

They may be very convincing, charming and persuasive. They can be young, old, male or female or even young children. They can appear official and may be smartly dressed with uniforms, official looking paperwork and fake ID's.

Elderly and vulnerable people, who are more trusting and often frail, are the main target of these despicable and cowardly criminals, and the consequences can be devastating for the victim and their families.

How to prevent a distraction burglary?

Please be aware that most utility companies no longer cold-call or show up unannounced; therefore if someone claims to be from one of these companies and they are genuine, they will have made a prior appointment.

The common utility companies in our area are: JCP&L, PSE&G, Elizabethtown Gas, Verizon and Comcast to name a few. You may utilize a different power, fuel or cable company, so be familiar with their logos and question anyone from another agency or utility that you aren't expecting.

The purpose of this letter is to raise awareness among the elderly, their families and care-givers, of how distraction burglars operate and what to do when confronted with an unexpected caller at their door. You do not have to let anyone in your house who you are not sure about; even if they claim to be on official business, it doesn't mean that they are.

Tips to keep safe:

The message is simple, **IF IN DOUBT, KEEP THEM OUT.**

1. **LOCK** - keep your front and back doors locked, even when at home
2. **STOP** - are you expecting anyone?
3. **CHAIN** - if you decide to open the door, put the chain on first if your door is equipped with one.
4. **CHECK** - ask for the caller's ID and check it by calling the company they are claiming to work for.

- Encourage older people to get into the habit of always locking their doors and by using a door chain or spy-hole.
- Telephone a neighbor, or a nearby friend, and ask them to come along to help check out the caller before you open the door to them.
- Insist on checking the identity of the caller. If they are genuine, they will not mind waiting or returning later. Do not use any telephone numbers provided by the caller as the number may be one of their associates.
- Don't keep large quantities of cash at home; put it in the bank where it is safe.
- Remember, it is not rude to refuse letting a stranger into your home.
- Call Hopewell Township Police and request an officer to come and verify the identity of the individual(s).
- If possible, try to note the description of the individual(s) and any vehicle but only if you feel safe doing so.

If you are suspicious and want an immediate response,

always call 9-1-1.