

Porch pirates primed to take packages

Steps to protect you from thieves lurking neighborhoods

By Robin Jones

Cyber Monday kicks off the busy season for more than just online retailers and delivery services. It also opens high season for porch pirates.

Of course, thieves who steal packages from homes operate year-round, but they're particularly active during the holidays. If you order gifts online, you risk becoming one of their victims. But there are ways to protect your purchases, including:

Have your packages delivered to a secure location – Many retailers allow you to opt for in-store pickup when you order online. You also can have packages sent to a UPS store or U.S. Postal Service (USPS) office, designated brick-and-mortar retailers, or to an Amazon Locker facility. Your apartment complex's leasing office also might accept packages.

Sign up for delivery alerts – Some retailers will send you an email or text when your package is dropped off, and most delivery services have apps that allow you to track packages. That way, you can make sure you are home to receive the package or you can ask a neighbor to collect it for you.

Install a security camera – A front-door camera alone might discourage



BAD GIFT – The holiday season brings more packages being left near the front doors of the homes of online shoppers. They can become a prize for porch pirates. Image: C5Media. Adobe Stock.

package pirates. Even if it doesn't, it will record the theft and give you evidence to bolster any claim you make.

Place a lockbox at your doorstep – This large container can be bolted to your property. After placing a package inside, a delivery person can secure it

with a combination lock. If a package is stolen, you have a few avenues for resolution, including:

Contact the retailer who sold you the item – Many sellers will provide a replacement or refund if you call customer service and explain what

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happened.

File a claim with the delivery service – If the retailer doesn't respond or attempt to resolve the issue, you can reach out to the outfit that delivered the package. FedEx, UPS, DHL and the USPS allow you to submit a claim for lost, damaged or delayed packages.

Call your credit card company – Most credit cards provide purchase protection, which reimburses you for items that are damaged or stolen, as long as you paid for the item entirely on the card and file the claim within a certain number of days of the purchase. Some high-value items aren't covered, though, and some credit card companies require you to file a police report or insurance claim first.

Talk to your insurance agent – A package stolen from your porch was on your property, so it is covered by your homeowners or rental insurance. However, your deductible applies if you file a claim, as do any limits on certain items.

Tragedies up importance of Move Over law

Not taking precaution leading to deaths of emergency responders

Slow down! And move over! It's a simple request, one that drivers should have no trouble following, particularly as the holiday season approaches. Too often, it's ignored, especially when it comes to roadside-assistance workers.

An average of 24 emergency responders, including tow providers, are struck and killed by vehicles while working at the roadside each year – meaning someone is killed, on average, every other week.

In 2019, 44 emergency responders in the U.S. – including 14 tow-truck drivers – died after being hit as they were working by the roadside.

Startling data from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety finds that among drivers who do not comply with Move Over laws, 42% thought this behavior was somewhat or not dangerous to emergency-roadside workers. This demonstrates that drivers may not realize how risky it is for those working or stranded along highways near moving traffic.

To protect these individuals, AAA and other traffic-safety advocates worked tirelessly to get Move Over laws passed in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Yet, the AAA Foundation finds that nearly a quarter of those surveyed (23%) are unaware of the Move Over law in the state in which they live.

Meanwhile, among those who are



TAKE CAUTION – A tow truck driver loads a disabled vehicle. Drivers approaching emergency-roadside workers should use caution and respect their state's Move Over law. Image: Adobe Stock.

aware of their state's Move Over laws, 15% report not understanding the potential consequences for violating the law.

The cost of fines varies from state to state, but they can be expensive. Penalty points could be added, as well as a misdemeanor charge for failure to move over or slow down when approaching an emergency vehicle, tow truck, utility vehicle or road-maintenance vehicle with

flashing lights on the side of the road.

These tragic accidents extend beyond tow providers and emergency responders. More than 1,600 people have been struck and killed while outside a disabled vehicle since 2015.

Drivers are increasingly distracted while driving. Previous AAA Foundation research found that motorists are as much as four times as likely to crash if they are talking on a cell phone while

driving and eight times as likely to be in a crash if texting.

AAA clubs have participated in educational initiatives regarding Move Over laws by creating public-service announcements and contacting state officials. AAA is committed to raising awareness of Move Over laws and the dangers associated with working at the roadside.

These laws require drivers to move over one lane or slow down when approaching an incident where tow providers, police, firefighters or emergency-medical-service crews are working at the roadside. Many states also have expanded their laws to cover vehicles like utility and municipal fleets, as well as disabled vehicles.

To protect roadside workers, drivers with disabled vehicles and others, AAA offers these precautionary tips:

- Remain alert, avoid distractions and focus on the task of driving.
- Keep an eye out for situations where emergency vehicles, tow trucks, utility-service vehicles or disabled vehicles are stopped on the side of the road.
- When you see these situations, slow down and, if possible, move over one lane and away from the people and vehicles stopped on the side of the road.

Slow down! And move over! It could save a life.