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News Release

December 7, 2015

For Immediate release

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Sheriff Greg Champagne advises, "Secure your home during Christmas holiday travel"

With the Christmas holidays fast approaching, many homeowners are making holiday travel plans which will take them from their homes, in some cases, for several days. But just how safe and secure are their homes while they travel? Well, not as safe as they could be, says Sheriff Champagne, especially if the home is left unattended and some simple, common sense precautions are not put into place.

"The reason that home security is of the utmost importance to us is simple. Everything we care about, including loved ones and personal possessions, may be at risk," Sheriff Champagne said.

According to the National Crime Prevention Council, one out of ten homes will be burglarized this year. Property crimes, or burglary and theft, are the most frequently reported crimes in this country. Experts have estimated that 99% of us will be victims of some form of theft—not direct robbery but something taken without confrontation—at least once in our lifetimes. Louisiana law enforcement agencies reported that more than 51,000 burglaries and 157,000 thefts occurred in our state in 1998.

How can you reduce your risk of becoming a victim of burglary or theft during the holidays and throughout the year? Sheriff Champagne has some practical suggestions for you to help secure your home.

- Advise your local law enforcement agency to place your home on its patrol list.
- Do not advertise your departure.
- Keep a parked car in your driveway.
- Set your lights and television on a timer.
- Have your newspaper stopped or ask a trusted neighbor or friend to pick up your paper and other leaflets while you are away.
- Do not state, on your answering machine, that you are away. If you do not have a machine, take your phone off the hook or turn the ringer on low so people do not hear your phone endlessly ringing.
- Try to be discreet when packing your luggage.
- Keep your blinds in their normal position- - a sudden change is an announcement that your home is unoccupied.
- Scatter a few items around your yard to create the illusion that someone is home.