

11/04/09
Personal Safety
Balcones Woods Neighborhood
Presented by Mike Dunn, Austin Police Department, District Representative
6:30 – 7:30
Balcones Woods Community Center

Bob Vehon opened the meeting and showed the group the notebook where he is storing the Personal Data Sheets collected from neighbors. Asked neighbors to come forward if interested in serving as a Block Captain for the Neighborhood Watch Program.

Bob Vehon introduced Mike Dunn.

Mike Dunn introduced himself. He has been with APD for 18 years. Congratulated Bob Vehon for his efforts in the community. Citizen and neighbor involvement helps police and safety of our community.

Personal Safety Presentation:

Philosophy of Personal Safety:

Have a plan. Criminals look for easy targets and bank on their victims being caught off guard. A victim of an assault can greatly increase their chances of survival and limit their losses if they "have a plan".

Things to think about when developing your plan of action:

1. Activities and environment you are involved in during the course of your day.
2. What tools you have available to protect yourself.
3. Do you listen to your instincts (the little voice in your head that says something is not right)?
4. Do you know how to contact the Police and feel comfortable asking for help.

Leave and arrive in a vehicle at your destination

1. Keep your vehicle in good mechanical condition (options you may consider when choosing a vehicle: keyless remote entry and panic alarm)
2. Let someone know when you're leaving, when you're going and what time you will be at your destination.
3. Have the keys to your vehicle in your hand ready to put in the door.
4. Keep your arms free. Don't over-burden yourself with packages or equipment. (Make several trips to your car to unload packages. Ask for help at grocery store or mall if needed.)
5. Check your vehicle's floor boards and back seat before getting in a vehicle.
6. Watch for headlights at night or vehicles in the day that appears to follow your path for unusually long distances of time.
7. Park as close to your destination as possible.
8. Park where your vehicle cannot be blocked in.
9. Do not park next to things that could be used as hiding places (dumpster, shrubs, walls)
10. Park in the best lighting available and lock your doors

Arriving at your destination safely

1. When arriving at night or before dusk have appropriate lighting be left on.
2. Scan the path from your vehicle to the door. Be aware of dark spaces, walls, bushes, vehicles, and corners.
3. Have a personal safety device readily available as well as your access to your destination. (Pepper spray sold at Academy and gun stores. Buy two, one to carry, and another to practice your spray/aim)

4. Once you enter a residence check the premises for any unauthorized person(s) and be sure that doors and windows are secure. If someone at the location makes you feel uncomfortable leave and call the appropriate personnel.
5. Keep your line of communications available at all times (cellular phone or landline).
6. If you observe any criminal activity, illegal drugs, assaultive or abusive behavior, or if you get that sixth sense feeling that makes the hair on your neck stand up, then you should leave and contact the police. Do not try to intervene or contact the police at the location where the activity is occurring.

What you need to know if you are confronted or overtaken

1. Escape is the best defense "Flight over Fight." If you see an opportunity to escape, then GO FOR IT! Scream for "HELP" or "FIRE"! More people react to the word "FIRE" than to the word "HELP."
2. Do not allow the subject to get you into a car or take you to a second location. This typically means that the subject is not comfortable carrying out his plan at this current location. Statistics show the survival rates decrease tremendously when victims are moved to a secondary location.

Remember to continue looking for your opportunity to "ESCAPE."

When things get physical

1. The strongest muscles in your body are located in your legs. Kick.
2. The hardest parts of your body are Elbows, Palms, Heels, and Knees.
3. The most vulnerable points on the body are soft tissue areas: Eyes, Throat, Nose and Groin.
4. If you have access to a weapon use it (Pepper sprays, sharp objects, hard objects – if it can inflict pain it can be used as a weapon.)

If you are forced into a vehicle

Wreck the vehicle out by grabbing the wheel and running it into something big enough to incapacitate the vehicle, escape and run for help. Remember to have that seatbelt on. This might make the suspect more at ease too, you don't plan on going anywhere, and seem cooperative. Be ready after the crash to take flight. Crash the vehicle on the side of the vehicle away from you to help you have a safe getaway, Don't hit a moving car, hit a hard object.

If you are placed in a trunk

1. Pull the taillights wire harness and look for an interior trunk release.
2. Break out the plastic taillight lens and hang something out of the opening. If the space is large enough stick your hand and fingers out to attract attention.

If you are being assaulted

1. Survive at all costs!
2. Throw-up, urinate on yourself, do anything and everything you can do to discourage your assailant.
3. Don't give up! You Must ESCAPE!

When a weapon is introduced

1. This is the most dangerous of all criminals. The mere introduction of a weapon suggests that this person is willing to take your life. Consider a knife just like a gun. Both can harm you.
2. According to retired homicide detective JJ Bittenbeinder (an expert in personal safety and street survival): When a weapon is used to force you into a vehicle or make you do something against your will – if a victim breaks free and runs at the first point of engagement, only 2% of those victims are actually shot.
3. If a weapon is introduced in a robbery throw your purse or money to the ground and run away. A robber is usually motivated by money and material things.

Personal safety tools

What tool is right for you? What is effective? What are you comfortable using?

1 Guns (concealed handgun license)

Pros: Ability to meet deadly force with deadly force.

Cons: Finality and Conscience
Proficiency and Accuracy
Safety carrying and storing
Retention
Liability
Expense
Be concerned that a gun can be used against you.

2 Pepper Sprays

Pros: Inexpensive very cost effective
Easy to master
Easy to Carry and conceal
Effective
Non-lethal

Cons: Not 100% effective
Effective range to 10 feet or less

Pepper Spray does have a shelf life, check for the expiration date on the can. Spray it in the face.

3 Personal Alarms

Pros: Inexpensive
Easy to carry and use

Cons: No offensive value as a weapon
Must rely on someone else to hear and take action

4 Self Defense Martial Arts

Pros: Health benefits
Confidence
Ability to overcome size and strength difference

Cons: Proficiency is needed to be effective
Time commitment training and practice
Can develop false sense of security

Other Notes:

Mass Transit:

Taxis: Look at the ID of the driver and let the driver know that you know his name. Say something like "I know a Jack Smith (drivers name) in my home town." That will tell the taxi driver that you will remember his name is Jack Smith.

Bus: Stay close to the front of the bus/driver. You are less likely to be assaulted at the front of the bus.

Public Elevators: If you feel uncomfortable about getting onto an elevator with another person, don't get on.

Walking: If you are not comfortable with someone walking towards you, cross the road and walk on the other side of the road.

Runners, Walkers, Joggers: If you are wearing headphones, you can't be aware of what is occurring around you. Someone can easily walk up to you without you hearing them.

Parking garages. Don't walk alone. Ask for office security to escort you to your car.

Stair wells: Don't walk alone, they can be very dangerous. Avoid.

If someone bumps you in your car in the dark, Don't get out in the secluded area. Drive to a well lit area.

Question and Answers:

Question: What if a police officer pulls you over and you aren't sure about the officer.

Answer: Don't break traffic laws but continue to drive until you are in a well-lit area. Let the officer know that you weren't comfortable stopping in the dark area.

Question: What do you do if you are surrounded by vehicles and feel unsafe.

Answer: Lock your vehicle and stay inside. Call 911. If you are in a vehicle that can run into one of the cars to move it out of the way, do so.

If you are a victim of a car jacking, let them have your car. If you are in a situation where you need to remove a child or baby from the backseat, throw your keys in one direction, remove your child, and run to safety.

Question: What do you do to mothers exposed when putting a child into the car?

Answer: Be familiar with the area to make sure you are safe. If you need help, ask the store or security officer to help. If you don't feel safe about the situation, trust your instinct.

Gateway Movie theater and REI are big areas for car thefts. Don't leave items out in the open in your car. As well, people may watch you put items in your trunk, then break in and release the trunk to get to your items.

Question: What is gang activity like in Austin?

Answer: There are significant gang issues in Austin. Austin/IH35 is a direct link to drug runners between the border, Houston, Dallas. It seems that the upper level of the gang members live in the richer areas of town.

Additional Comments:

If you feel threatened and have On-Star in your car, contact On-Star. On-Star is also helpful in car thefts.

Honda parts are in high demand of car thefts for parts, wheels, rims, windshield wiper motors, etc. Catalytic converters are also in high demand.

Home Security Inspections: APD will come to your home for a free in-home security check. It takes about 15 minutes and the officer will help you identify any area of your home that could be a security threat. If interested, contact Mike Dunn to arrange for an inspection (974-5553).

The meeting was over at 7:30. Everyone thanked Officer Dunn for his presentation.