

Dealing with the "Holidaze," the Travel and the Shopping Maze: American Public University Experts Offer Holiday Sanity and Safety Tips

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CHARLES TOWN, W.V.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec. 7, 2009-- The 2009 holiday season is officially underway – and while most of us look forward to the fun and excitement, some feel overwhelmed by the stress of office parties, family get-togethers, winter travel and grid-locked shopping mall parking lots.

To keep the holidays safe and sane, American Public University System (APUS) Professors John D. Moore, Ph.D., Tim Hardiman, and Mariana Leckner, Ph.D., offer holiday revelers, shoppers and consumers a set of easily achievable tips and suggestions.

Tim Hardiman, a professor of criminal justice, and **Dr. Mariana Leckner**, an associate professor of science, point out that while holiday shopping and winter travel can be fun, it's important to minimize risk by taking a few commonsense steps to make your experience less stressful:

- Have the right equipment in your car to ensure safety and peace of mind – Before winter weather sets in, check your tires, battery, cooling system and windshield fluid. Keep a bag of sand or kitty litter in your trunk if you're in an area prone to icing or snow to use for tire traction if you get stuck on ice. And if you must use the cell phone when you're on the road, be sure to have a hands-free unit.
- Drive wisely and safely – It seems like common sense, but sometimes the obvious is elusive to us in the go-go pace of the holidays. Know where you're going by checking an online mapping site beforehand or using a GPS system if you have one in your car. Be aware of sudden temperature drops and the incidence of "black ice" in parking lots and on side streets. Slow down and concentrate on driving – not the family shopping drama that may be taking place all around you. And by all means, don't ever drink and then drive.
- Be an aware and alert shopper – While shopping malls are aglow with lights, decorations, and excited children, they also can be hangouts for petty thieves and others who could ruin your holiday spirit. As a result, you should be aware of your surroundings at all times. In stores, don't flash your money and be sure not to leave behind receipts. Online, keep your passwords in a

- secure place and be extra careful not to be lured by phishing sites.
- Know the weather forecast in advance – Winter weather can change rapidly. Melting snow and ice can freeze rapidly after sunset. Watch for patches of ice when walking around malls and parking lots to avoid falling. Also, be aware that winds can increase your chances of hypothermia, so bundle up and limit your time outside!

Dr. John Moore, an APU professor of psychology and health sciences, notes that for those who must deal with emotionally distant family members, a recent break-up, or childhood memories marred by family drinking or fighting, the holidays can be a particularly trying time. Dr. Moore offers these coping strategies:

- Don't force yourself into the holiday spirit – Instead of forcing yourself to “get happy,” embrace your current emotions and focus on what thoughts or events are making you feel down. Are your family members difficult to deal with? Did someone from your childhood hurt you and the holidays bring those bad memories back? If so, consider recording what you are feeling in a personal journal. This will help you to zone in on the specific emotions you are experiencing and encourage catharsis.
- Avoid emotionally difficult situations – Does the thought of spending time with your family during the holidays cause anxiety? If so, it may be time to ask yourself: “*Do I really have to go to this gathering?*” Joy works both ways, so perhaps spending time with a “Created Family” (otherwise known as close friends) may make more sense than attending an emotionally charged family gathering.
- Be good to yourself -- Being good to you does not mean buying yourself into debt by purchasing the latest trendy gizmo. It means realizing that you cannot be all things to all people. The point here is rather than doing everything under the sun for other people, *let someone do it do for you*. Does this sound selfish – maybe a bit vain? Perhaps, but there are times when being “selfish” is healthy.

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