

Make the holidays happy and safe

Some tips to keep it a fun time

The holiday season is a time of celebration and reflection. It's supposed to be filled with family, fun and festivities.

To keep it a joyous time, it's a good idea to practice some basic safety techniques.

WHILE SHOPPING:

Don't leave presents in plain view inside your car, that's just asking for trouble. Always lock your car and put the gifts in the trunk, or hide them under something. When you get home take everything out of the car.

Don't flash cash in public, and don't take all your credit cards with you. Only carry as much money as you need.

Be aware of your surroundings, and stay in well-lit areas. Make sure you park your vehicle in a well-lit parking lot.

Toy drive needs help

Barrels are scattered around the City for donations to the annual Firefighters and Kops for Kids Toy Drive. Toys are needed for kids up to age 12. To donate money or volunteer, call 385-6942.

AT HOME:

Packages left at the front door are inviting a thief. Schedule deliveries when you are home, or make arrangements for a friend or neighbor to accept your packages.

Don't put gifts near windows and crush boxes of expensive items so you're not advertising the presents people received.

WHEN LEAVING HOME

Don't drink and drive! Always have a designated driver if you are consuming alcohol. And always watch out for the drivers who are driving after drinking!

When you are gone, lock all doors and windows and use a security system if you have one. Make your home look occupied by leaving on some lights, a radio or TV. Use timers to vary the lights that are left on.

If you leave town for the holidays be sure



Enjoy the holidays, but be sure to exercise caution so they aren't spoiled.

to tell a neighbor how long you will be gone and where you can be reached. Ask if they can check your house daily and pick up any mail or newspapers.

Take advantage of the Vacation House Check provided by the Merced Police Department's Volunteers In Police Services (VIPS). Forms are available online or at the Central Police Station, 611 W. 22nd St.

Forms must be mailed or dropped off at the Central Station.

CHRISTMAS TREES

If you have a live tree, make sure it is fresh. Saw off the bottom half inch and put it in a stand that holds water. Make sure it is well-watered.

Never use candles on a Christmas tree or other live greenery. Use only approved electric light strands. Turn off the lights before you go to bed.

Have your chimney inspected annually. Don't burn wrapping paper in the fireplace and only light fires on approved days.

Dispose of your live tree in the green refuse can. Cut the tree into pieces if necessary to fit it into the refuse container. The City no longer picks up trees placed in the gutters.

Municipal Charter undergoing review

The Merced City Council has decided that the Municipal Charter will undergo a review in 2007. The Charter is the City's version of a Constitution, and governs the structure of City government and the City operations, from hiring practices to ordinances.

Any changes to the Charter must be approved by a majority of voters.

The Charter was established in 1949 and has been amended eight times. Some of the modifications brought the Charter into compliance with new state laws, but some changes were substantial, such as adding the election of a mayor and the imposition of term limits.

One of the intents of reviewing the Charter is to bring it up-to-date. For example, the Charter requires that all public works projects with a total cost of \$5,000 or more must be put out to bid.

Using the Consumer Price Index, that \$5,000 in 1949 is worth \$42,836.13 in today's dollars. Because of rising construction costs, virtually all public works projects must go through the formal bid process, adding to the expense of the project.

The City Council decided it wanted a nine member Citizens Advisory Committee to review the Charter and develop proposals for the City Council to consider. The Council could accept those recommendations, modify them or add its own proposals.

Any meetings on amending the Charter would be public, including meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee. The City Council would need to vote to send any proposals to the voters for the final approval.

The goal is to have any Charter revisions on the ballot for the Nov. 6, 2007 general election. Estimated costs of the review would be about \$45,000 for staff time and election materials.

Check the City's website, www.cityofmerced.org, for information on the application process and other information.

Holiday schedules

The City of Merced offices will be closed for Christmas, Monday, Dec. 25 and New Years Day, Monday, Jan. 1.

City residential refuse collection will be delayed one day during the holiday weeks. Your refuse will be collected Tuesday through Saturday. For example, if your regular collection day is Tuesday, trash will be picked up on Wednesday.

Emergency services will be provided, but the offices will be closed to the public.

The City Council

Mayor Ellie Wooten

Mayor Pro Tem Joe Cortez

Councilmember Michele Gabriault-Acosta

Councilmember Rick Osorio

Councilmember Carl Pollard

Councilmember Jim Sanders

Councilmember Bill Spriggs

Contacting us

The City of Merced wants the site www.cityofmerced.org to be a one-stop source for information on the City. It contains City Council agendas and minutes, the Municipal Code, the General Plan, news releases, department listings, e-mail addresses, phone numbers and information on local officials.

Merced Civic Center

678 W. 18th St.

Merced CA 95340

Open Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m., except holidays

City Council 385-6834

City Manager 385-6834

City Attorney 385-6868

Code Enforcement..... 385-6855

Finance 385-4718

Inspection Services 385-6861

Personnel 385-6839

Planning Department..... 385-6858

Public Works (7:30-4:30) ... 385-6800

Recreation/Parks 385-6855

IN AN EMERGENCY

DIAL 911

Fire Department..... 385-6891

Police Department..... 385-6912

Newsletter update

Coming next month: The winner of the Name-This-Newsletter Contest.

There's a new airline in town — US Airways



Merced's new air carrier is US Airways, with 23 round-trip flights a week to Las Vegas McCarran International Airport. The arrival of the air carrier means that passengers in Merced will be able to book tickets on connecting flights around the world. Ticket information is available at www.usairways.com or by calling 1-800-2FLY-AWA. Tickets also can be purchased at the Merced Airport or from travel agencies.

Merced moves closer to being an Enterprise Zone

The City of Merced, along with the County, Atwater, Los Banos, Dos Palos, Gustine and Livingston, has received a conditional designation as an Enterprise Zone from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The City already had the designation, but it is expiring. Enterprise Zones are intended to promote new business ventures through the use of incentives such as hiring credits and various tax credits.

Before the full status as an Enterprise Zone is given, an environmental impact report must be certified and an agreement must be signed between the County and the participating six cities.

Online survey helps us improve

The City of Merced is asking residents to take an online survey to help us improve City services. There is a general survey, along with several surveys for specific departments.

Each survey takes about 5 minutes to complete. There's a link, Online Survey, on our home page at www.cityofmerced.org. Thanks for your help.

Recycling question answered

One of our recent online survey takers wasn't sure what plastics are accepted in the City recycling program.

Any plastic item with the number 1 through 7 on it can be put in the blue refuse container for recycling.

Fire station also is a GPS station

Fire Station 55 on Parsons Avenue has a GPS (Global Positioning System) Reference Station that covers the City. Current units used by City crews will be accurate to within 6 inches. Using survey accurate units, the City Engineering Department says accuracy is within 1/4-inch. The GPS station is located above the AC units.

