

BBB Offers Top Tips to Outsmart Porch Pirates and Delivery Scams!

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The holidays are fast approaching, and with that comes spikes in reports to [BBB Scam Tracker](#) regarding delivery-related scams and “porch pirates” – thieves who brazenly steal delivered items right off your front step or porch.

Con artists are aware that many people anticipate package deliveries during this season, making them less likely to question messages about delivery issues. Additionally, thieves recognize that more packages will be left unattended on home porches and steps. These scenarios make people more vulnerable to package and delivery scams during the holiday season.

Fortunately, your BBB has several tips to help you identify and avoid delivery-related issues so you can focus on enjoying the holidays with family and friends:

Watch for phishing texts or emails claiming to be from delivery companies. It can be hard to tell a valid delivery text from a bogus one, but there are common red flags to watch for. The bogus messages usually claim that the shipper is having difficulty delivering a package or needs an update to your delivery preferences. In either case, a “tracking link” is included, and that’s where the issues come in.

By clicking on a link in a message from an unknown or unexpected sender, you could be taken to a form that’s designed to gain personal information and steal your identity. A link could also lead you to a site that downloads malware onto your computer or phone without you detecting it. This could include a virus or even spyware that allows scammers to gather your keystrokes. As you log into your accounts, including your bank accounts, they could be tracking your login information.

Beware of fake “missed delivery” tags or similar calls. With these scams, someone places a note on your door that claims they’re having challenges delivering a package to you. They ask you to call a phone number or visit a website to reschedule your delivery, but it’s actually another trick to deceive you into sharing your personal information.

In similar cases, you might receive a phone call from someone claiming to be with a legitimate delivery company. Your caller ID could even show that they’re calling from a well-known delivery business - but a delivery company will rarely call you. Caller ID spoofing apps are readily available and often used by scammers to change their info and trick you into believing you’re being contacted by a trustworthy company.

You can take several precautions to ensure a safe delivery of your orders and gifts:

Always get delivery tracking numbers and check the shipping progress periodically. If you’ve ordered gifts that will be delivered to your home or directly to family and friends, be sure you always get delivery tracking numbers and check the shipping progress periodically. You only want to check by using what you’ve confirmed is a valid website for the shipper that is providing delivery.

As noted above, another issue shoppers face is [package theft](#). According to a [Security.org study](#), package thieves stole more than \$18 billion in merchandise over the last year.

Many consumers have had their packages stolen before they arrive home from work. Thieves also snatch packages from doorsteps or lobbies of apartment or condo complexes. Criminals even follow delivery and postal trucks. As soon as a truck leaves, the crooks move in and grab the parcels.

To help minimize the chance of having your packages hijacked, consider taking one or more of the following steps:

Don’t leave unattended packages. When possible, do not leave delivered packages unattended for long periods. If you are expecting a package, attempt to schedule its delivery when you know you will be home. Ask trusted neighbors to pick up and hold a package(s) for you, especially if you plan to be gone for an extended time. Also consider having the package delivered to your workplace or directly to the address of a trusted friend who you know will be home.

Sign up for notification services: Most retailers provide tracking details with links to delivery services; some even send their own emails to let you know when something has landed on your stoop. Opt-in to shipping-related emails. Set up your own notifications with your smartphone or app to remind you of the date and time of expected delivery.

Use a security camera. Installing a [home security system](#) with cameras or a [video doorbell](#) is a great way to deter package theft, especially when highly visible. You can also set up camera alerts, so you know exactly when the package is delivered. Consider including a sign that specifically states that the residence is under surveillance.

Even if a package is stolen from your porch, the video evidence will help law enforcement track down the thieves.

Require a signature. Many delivery companies include the option to require a signature before leaving a package, letting you take physical possession of the item as soon as it is delivered. While this option works well for those often at home, especially for expensive items, it may create difficulties in receiving packages if your schedule and the delivery service differ. Be sure to check with the delivery company on their policy for packages that are not signed for, as they may return it to the sender after a certain number of attempts.

Ship to store or a designated delivery location. If you're purchasing an item from a retailer with a physical location near your home, consider shipping it there instead. Retailers will require proof of purchase or identification before releasing packages they have received, and this is a sure way to avoid porch pirates.

Consider a package receiving service. Some major retailers, such as Amazon, offer secure package-receiving locations away from your home that you can access with a key or code. Some independent businesses also specialize in this service, allowing you to designate a different delivery location for your packages and the ability to pick them up on your way home.

P.O. Box rental: If porch pirates are often in your area and you are planning to do quite a bit of online shopping, you may want to consider renting a P.O. Box to receive package deliveries. The cost may outweigh the headaches.

For more information about shopping and safety during the holidays, visit [BBB's holiday HQ](#) at bbb.org/holiday.

Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia, and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763- 4222, Web site: BBB.org or E-mail: info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org.