

Taking Precautions

101 PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS for JUDGES and COURT STAFF

Since the tragic murders of a judge, court reporter, and court service officer at the Fulton County Superior Courthouse in Atlanta, Georgia, on March 11, 2005, deadly shootings and serious security incidents continue to plague our nation's courts. Each one serves as a painful reminder that judges and court staff are at risk and at all times should be aware of their environment, take safety precautions, and use security procedures. The safety tips below are useful reminders for personal safety.

Home and Personal Life

1. Do not let your guard down at home. Practice good safety techniques.
2. Do not keep or carry a weapon unless it is in proper working condition and you have been trained in the correct use of it.
3. Do not answer your door (or any door) without looking through a peephole or knowing who is on the other side.
4. Do not use the title "Judge" on personal checks, credit cards, airline tickets, etc.
5. Do not use your judiciary authority or title to perform peacekeeping functions when you are away from your court. Leave that to the police. Be a good witness.
6. Do not volunteer personal information to strangers or identify yourself as a judge. If asked, identify yourself as an attorney, government employee, etc.
7. Do not unreasonably expose yourself to persons with communicable diseases (e.g. HIV virus, hepatitis, tuberculosis, etc.).

8. Do not forget to have a Personal and Family Information Sheet secured with the local law enforcement agency in your jurisdiction so that it can be used in an emergency situation.

Home Telephone

9. Do not have a listed or published telephone number or address.
10. Do not announce your name and phone number on the outgoing message on your home answering machine.
11. Do not tell anonymous callers on your home telephone your name or the phone number they have reached.
12. Do not allow strangers to overhear your personal telephone calls.
13. Do not expect privacy when talking on a cellular or cordless telephone.
14. Do not return office telephone calls from your residence phone if "Caller I.D." is not in operation in your area and if you do not have "Caller I.D. Blocking." Otherwise, the

person you call will obtain a digital readout of your home telephone number.

15. Do not call "800" numbers or make collect calls unless you want your phone number to appear on the call recipient's phone bill.

Home Mailing Address

16. Do not use your street address on your personal mail's return address if you can use a post office box.
17. Do not put your name on your return address if you use a residence street address or deposit your mail in outgoing office mail.
18. Do not take magazines to the courthouse until you remove mailing labels containing your name and address.

Commuting

19. Do not always drive the same route to and from your home and office.
20. Do not arrive at or leave the courthouse at the same time every day.
21. Do not leave the courthouse during the day without confidentially letting someone know where you are going, what you will be doing, and

when you should be expected to return to the building.

22. Do not be paranoid, but be aware if someone is staring at you or following you.
23. Do not drive to your street of residence if you even *think* someone might be following you. Gas is cheaper than your life, so drive another block or two before deciding whether or not to go home.
24. Do not enter or leave the courthouse in darkness if you can avoid it.
25. Do not transport your judicial robe in your vehicle by hanging it up unless it is covered up. If not concealed, lay it on the seat or in the trunk to hide it.

Courthouse Parking Lot

26. Do not reserve your parking space with a sign that says "Judge" or your name.
27. Do not have a personalized license plate that says "JUDGE" on it.
28. Do not go to your vehicle if someone is watching you that had business within your court. Either wait, or walk to a vehicle first that is not yours, and then act like you forgot something and return to the building.
29. Do not leave your car unlocked or the windows down.
30. Do not enter your vehicle without first looking under

the car and inside for any signs of hidden persons or tampering.

At the Courthouse

31. Do not conduct court sessions or hearings in the absence of a court security officer.
32. Do not sit on or behind a bench that is not elevated.
33. Do not sit on a bench that does not have protective material behind it to stop bullets.
34. Do not run from the bench if shooting begins in your courtroom. Drop behind it and lie flat.
35. Do not allow law enforcement officers to enter your courtroom with a weapon if the officer is a party to a case pending in your court. This is especially important in domestic relations cases.
36. Do not allow anyone to approach the bench without first asking for and receiving your permission.
37. Do not ever let a party or criminal defendant think your decision was "personal" or that you have some personal dislike or animosity toward them.
38. Do not allow disruptive persons to remain in your courtroom if you can have them legally removed.

39. Do not hesitate to request additional security for a high-risk trial or a high-risk person.

40. Do not be reluctant to ask for ask for more money for court security at budget hearings.
41. Do not forget to wear your judicial robe in the courtroom. It will normally command respect, and like a police uniform, it will make you more difficult to recognize off of the bench when you have removed your robe (your 'uniform').
42. Do not operate your court without "Rules of Courtroom Decorum" that are prominently posted and vigorously enforced.
43. Do not allow the number of persons in your courtroom to exceed fire code. In addition to fire safety, this can be used to exclude any unruly or intimidating spectators.
44. Do not drink from glasses or water pitchers that have been left unattended in the courtroom on the bench.
45. Do not think that just because you have never had court violence that it will never happen in your courtroom.

In Your Chamber

46. Do not display family photographs in your chambers where visitors can see them. Turn them toward you.
47. Do not allow persons in the custody of law enforcement to be brought to your residence or chambers. Meet them in the courtroom or police station.

48. Do not hesitate to call a court security officer to your chambers at the first hint of a security problem.
 49. Do not allow anyone to be seated in your office or chambers in your absence without your prior consent.
 50. Do not leave valuables or sensitive papers in sight and unlocked when you leave your office. This is especially important if maintenance or cleaning persons will be entering during your absence.
 51. Do not allow anyone to close the door to your chambers other than you, your court security officer or someone you have instructed to do so.
 52. Do not use hollow core doors on your chambers.
 53. Do not discard sensitive materials or information in your home or office trash can in a legible form that could be read by scavengers.
 54. Do not leave file cabinets, desk drawers, briefcases, etc. unlocked when you leave your office.
 55. Do not photocopy sensitive data without accounting for each original and copy.
- Throughout the Facility**
56. Do not have heavy or sharp items on the bench or your desk where others can grab them. Leave them in drawers.
 57. Do not leave your lunch in a common area accessible to the public. If you do, label it with another name or a symbol.
 58. Do not walk past windows or sit in a courtroom that has windows without blinds.
 59. Do not run into the hallway if you hear gunfire in the courthouse. Seek immediate cover and have your chambers and courtroom secured.
 60. Do not allow the public access to your mail room.
 61. Do not issue combination lock codes or building keys without keeping records and periodically changing codes and locks.
 62. Do not be afraid to visualize court security problems and think about what you can do to reduce risks and what options are available to you if an incident occurs.
 63. Do not assume that duress alarms are in working condition. Test them regularly.
 64. Do not use an audible duress alarm that will force a person to quickly flee or fight. They might fight! Use a silent alarm.
 65. Do not allow intoxicated persons to enter or remain in the courthouse.
 66. Do not leave your court security manual or security materials where others can access them.
 67. Do not allow architects to design your courtroom, chambers, or courthouse without receiving your input.
 68. Do not allow budgets to be prepared without providing for court security.
 69. Do not use the main, public courthouse doors if you can avoid doing so.
 70. Do not be reluctant to have your staff make a "coded" mark on any case file folder that can indicate a potentially violent or unstable person.
 71. Do not hire, appoint, or accept a court security officer until you have reviewed their résumé, personnel file and background check.
 72. Do not allow your staff to tell strangers where you are or give out your schedule.
 73. Do not get onto an elevator with persons you do not know or are not comfortable with.
 74. Do not try to get up if you have been shot. Play dead and do not move. Wait for help. Do not invite another shot.
 75. Do not become physically involved in subduing, chasing, or apprehending disorderly persons or escapees.
 76. Do not forget to teach your staff and your family what you have learned about judicial safety and security.
 77. Do not forget that none of the other judges killed or wounded went to work or home thinking they would be attacked. Be alert and aware!

Telephone and Mail

78. Have a tape recorder and telephone microphone to tape record any office or telephone conversations in both your office and home.
79. Do not continue to talk on the telephone with a person who is hostile or threatening unless the person identifies himself or herself to you.
80. Do not open any envelopes or parcels that look suspicious or have no return address, especially if you were not expecting such.
81. Do not throw away "hate mail." Keep a file containing them (or notes of conversations) that may be helpful to you and detectives down the road.
82. Do not open unlabelled packages or gifts delivered to your home or office.

Public and the Media

83. Make restaurant reservations and give fast food orders using a nickname or a name you will remember and recognize when called but is not so unusual as to attract attention.
84. Do not use public restrooms unless unavoidable.
85. Do not sit near front windows in restaurants.
86. Do not eat food prepared or served by persons you have had in your court as criminal defendants or losing parties.
87. Do not publicly announce

that you are going out of town for work or vacation.

88. Do not wear shirts or caps in public that identify you as a judge.
89. Do not become intoxicated in public, thereby becoming vulnerable.
90. Do not ride in parades unless there are provisions made for security and crowd control.
91. Keep a press-clipping file so you will know what information the public has received about you.
92. Do not be quoted in the news in such a manner as to make the public think that you fear violence or that you think you are not at risk. Such comments can be taken as an invitation or a challenge.
93. Do not tell the media (or publish reports) about the kind of security you have in place or what weaknesses your court has that need to be improved.
94. Do not update photographs on file with the news media or the government if you can avoid it. An exception is the photograph that should accompany the Personal and Family Information Sheet, which is confidentially maintained
95. Do not allow the media to show photographs of

your family or your residence after there has been an incident of court-related violence.

96. Do not allow the media to learn the names, ages, or schools of your children.

Campaign

97. Do not place your residence address on campaign materials.
98. Do not appear at campaign fund raising events unless you have arranged for security. Consider control of admission by invitations or limit ticket sales or distribution.
99. Do not personally post or remove your campaign signs.
100. Do not campaign door-to-door alone.
101. Do not overdo it with your campaign signs at your residence or bumper stickers on your personal vehicles.

NOTE: Review this list periodically to refresh your memory. Awareness of these tips for your personal safety and security will improve your chances for survival in an incident. Tips are used with the permission of the Johnson County, Kansas Sheriff's Department.

**Further information contact:
National Center for State Courts
Court Consulting Services
707 17th Street – Suite 2900
Denver, CO 80202
(303) 305-4315**

