

Safety Tips for Casino Patrons

By David Vialpando

The 35-year old man answered the knock at his door in the middle of the night and was violently confronted by the three masked gunmen, demanding the money he won earlier in the evening at a local casino. The victim handed over his \$35,000 in winnings without hesitation, and counts himself lucky that the robbers were satisfied with their haul and left him unharmed. Without a doubt, his fate could have been much worse.

Casinos can be exciting, fun-filled places to spend a few hours trying one's luck at Blackjack, testing one's skill at the poker table, or wrestling a few dollars from the one-armed bandit, but in any public venue where crowds of people and loads of cash come together, you will find those who would prey on the unwitting and take advantage of a gambler's good fortune. Card rooms and casinos invest a significant portion of their revenue investing in high tech surveillance equipment, and well-trained security and surveillance staff to protect casino customers.

As recent news reports have revealed, organized criminal groups will distract customers and steal their winnings and valuables, follow customers away from the casino and violently rob them at the first opportunity, or befriend the unwitting and steal whatever they can as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

Chances are your next visit to the casino will be uneventful, except for the excitement of walking away a winner. The following safety tips are offered to help ensure that your next visit to a card room or a casino is enjoyable and pleasantly memorable.

Tip #1: Don't Allow Yourself to Be Distracted

A casino can be a busy, action-packed place. Thieves will take advantage of the constant distractions to bump you, or otherwise distract you from your valuables. Keep your bags, wallet, money, chips, and other valuables close at hand and never allow others to divert your attention.

Tip #2: Avoid Making Yourself a Target for Thieves

Divide your money among different pockets or bag compartments. Avoid carrying money and valuables in fanny packs, as these can be easily cut and removed from your person. Place a thick rubber-band around your wallet to make it harder for pick-pockets to remove. Keep purses and bags in front of you at all times.

Tip #3: Don't Draw Attention to Yourself and Your Winnings

Don't walk away from the cashier's cage counting your money. Secure your money before leaving the cage. Offer to write your address for cage personnel when requested, rather than provide it verbally. You don't know who may be listening. As

your winnings accumulate, feel free to color-up (exchange lower denomination chips for higher denomination chips), as these will be easier for you to track.

Tip #4: Report Anything Unusual

If you sense you are being followed inside the casino, or experience any uneasiness at all, don't hesitate to contact casino security personnel.

Tip #5: Consider Alternative Means of Receiving Large Winnings

- Request your winnings in the form of a check made out to you.
- Leave the majority of your winnings in your casino player's account, and withdraw in smaller amounts over several days.
- Request a security escort to your vehicle and monitor vehicles following you out of the parking lot. If you believe you are being followed, call your local police emergency number or drive to the nearest law enforcement agency or fire department.

Tip #6: Remain Vigilant After Leaving the Casino

Organized groups of robbers will follow casino customers possessing large sums of money away from the casino and assault them at the first opportunity, such as the grocery store or the driveway of the victim's home. Pay attention to the cars around you upon leaving the casino. If you feel you are being followed, call your local police emergency number and follow the operator's instructions. If you cannot contact law enforcement, drive to the nearest law enforcement agency or fire station. If you are the victim of a robbery, be sure to tell law enforcement that you recently left the casino with your winnings. Casino surveillance video can be reviewed to possibly identify those responsible for the crime.

Tip #7: Avoid Gambling Alone

If at all possible, gamble with other people you know and resolve to keep an eye out for each other. Thieves will frequently target the customer who is alone or the person who appears vulnerable. If you are gambling alone, feel free to request a security escort to your vehicle or upon leaving the premises.

Tip #8: Closely Monitor Your Alcoholic Beverage Intake

Besides affecting your motor skills and your ability to drive home safely, alcohol impairs your judgment and vigilance. It is easier for thieves to distract those whose faculties are impaired by alcohol.

Tip # 9: Be Wary of Strangers

Casino customers are encouraged to be friendly and courteous towards each other, but be careful sharing too much personal information with strangers, particularly when you are winning. Criminals will take advantage of the happy feelings good fortune brings to get close to their victim and exploit them, perhaps by asking them for a ride home. These criminals rarely work alone, and a victim lured away from the casino can quickly find themselves surrounded by several people intent on acts of violence.

Tip #10: If Confronted, Think Safety First

Money and valuables can be replaced, but your life cannot. If you become the victim of crime, do everything in your power to ensure your safety. This may mean avoiding resistance and surrendering your property. Your goal should be to minimize injury to yourself, and those who may be with you.

The **Institute for Casino Security and Management** has prepared a multi-media presentation on casino safety tips for casino patrons, which can be made available to card rooms and casinos. ICSM can be contacted through their website at **ICSM.US**.