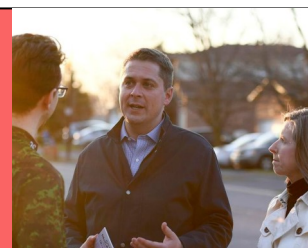


# An Garda Síochána

## Crime Prevention Information Sheet



### Personal Security Advice for Elected Officials



#### Introduction

Thankfully there have been very few major incidents involving violence toward local or national politicians, although when attacks do take place they are widely publicised. This could lend itself to making some elected officials feel that they are more exposed to attacks because of the decisions they are involved in making.

Many elected officials will have experienced unpleasant or challenging interactions with a member of the public, and verbal or written abuse is often accepted as being part and parcel of the role. Whilst most of the aggression experienced will be at the low end of the spectrum of unacceptable behaviour, severe abuse could be considered an offence under the Non Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997.



Crime can happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere. The culprits think they won't get caught and the victim thinks it won't be me! The reality is very different. For every crime there is always a victim. **Not every culprit will get caught but every victim will**

**suffer.** This information leaflet is designed to reduce your risk of injury and/or loss from crime in Public Places.

Being "**Streetwise**" means trusting your gut instincts, being observant and responding to the information your environment is giving you. Even before you venture outside good preparation will make you feel more "Streetwise":

- Tell a friend or a relative where you are going – and what time you are expected back.

- Charge your mobile telephone and programme emergency numbers into the directory .
- Consider a personal alarm and check the batteries before you leave home or office .
- Wear comfortable shoes that you can move quickly in, if you need to .
- Fill up with fuel during daylight hours.
- Regularly check your tyres (including the spare).



- Check your route, and avoid areas that you feel uncomfortable driving through alone.
- Avoid placing your handbag or valuables on the passenger seat beside you.

- Lock your doors when driving around towns and in remote areas.
- Park Smart in well lit areas.
- If a situation is making you feel vulnerable drive to the nearest Garda Station.
- If you are using public transport; check timetables before you leave. Keep your valuables secure. Sit close to the driver. Avoid empty carriages. Have enough money for a taxi in an emergency.
- If you are cycling to an appointment, wear appropriate clothing, park your bicycle in a well lit, secure location and use quality locks, securing it to an immovable object.

#### LOCK IT OR LOSE IT



It may be difficult to vary your routine as an elected official but where possible try to avoid:

- Leaving or returning home at exactly the same time.
- Walking the same routes at the same times.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS OR OTHER CRIME PREVENTION ISSUES,  
PLEASE CONTACT  
your local GARDÁ CRIME PREVENTION OFFICER  
or  
visit the Garda website at [www.garda.ie](http://www.garda.ie)**

- Parking in the same spot.
- Similar daily routines.
- Holding meetings or clinics in the same place at the same time every week or month.

**Home visits are a part of your role but have you considered alternatives:**

- Can the meeting be carried out by telephone – or even by email?
- Can a colleague attend the meeting with you?
- Could you meet in a public place – eg. a community centre or even a local café?

**In an instance where the previous options are not practical or possible:**

- Arrange the visit during normal working hours.
- When you arrange the visit ask who else may be in the property.
- Make sure that a responsible person knows exactly where you are, and has an idea of what time you are expected to leave.
- Carry out a mini 'risk assessment' on the property before approaching.
- After knocking at the door, stand back and to the side. When the resident answers the door, before going straight in, engage them in a door step conversation. Use your senses: smell, sight, hearing, gut-feel – and if anything feels 'off' make an excuse for not going in.
- Should a resident not be dressed, or in a state of undress, do not enter the property. Say you will wait outside until they are clothed, or arrange another appointment.
- If you decide that it is safe to enter, note the way in and out, type of catch/lock on the door and how to operate it should the need arise.
- Avoid meeting in the kitchen. It provides many possibilities when it comes to dangerous weapons that are best avoided.
- If you are invited to sit down, try to sit near the door.
- If the resident's behaviour deteriorates, make an excuse and leave. Even if they have calmed down.

**Bad Behaviour**

You are the best assessor of risk and if a person's behaviour frightens you, then doing nothing is not an option. Often it is not just one signal, but a combination of a number of features of a person's behaviour which raises our sense of fear:

- Intimidating non-verbal behaviour – including exaggerated hand and arm movements.
- Prolonged eye contact.
- Standing too close.
- Saying things which we find illogical or sit outside our own frame of reference.
- Repeating sentences over again.
- Actual threat of harm (to you or your family or property).

**Harassment** is an offence. Any person who, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, by any means including by use of the telephone, harasses another by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting or communicating with him or her, shall be guilty of an offence.

**Holding Clinics;** Choose your venue wisely and avoid holding clinics alone in an otherwise empty building. Select a building where you have a good and reliable mobile telephone signal – and ideally where there is good access. Your local Crime Prevention Officer can advise you on securing your permanent offices. They can discuss physical and electronic security with you, to create a safer environment.

**Callers to your own home**

Whilst some elected officials are happy to see people in their own home, others will avoid this, unless the person concerned is well known to them. People should be advised to contact you by telephone or email, or through formal clinics. Ordinarily, unexpected doorstep callers should not be invited into a property unless known and trusted, and callers should be encouraged to make formal appointments.



If you decide that you will be open to home visits, you should also review your home security which should include carrying out a formal risk assessment. The **Garda Home Security Check List Challenge** is a good start and your local CPO can provide more in depth security advice should you require it.

**Dial 999 or 112 in case of an emergency**

**The Garda National Crime Prevention Unit, Garda H.Q., Harcourt Square, Dublin 2.**  
**Tel: (01) 6663669,**  
**Email: GNCPU@garda.ie**

**For Contact Details of your Local Crime Prevention Officer and for further Crime Prevention Advice See www.garda.ie**