



CITY OF PUNTA GORDA

POLICE

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NEWS RELEASE

June 1, 2015

Punta Gorda Police Announce *Safe Exchange Zone* Initiative

The Punta Gorda Police Department is pleased to announce a new initiative designed to help Punta Gorda customers remain safe while conducting business transactions resulting from online commerce. The department has designated the Public Safety lobby, which is open 24 hours/7 days a week, as a **Safe Exchange Zone** for customers meeting with individuals to transact business resulting from online deals.

For years, websites such as *Craigslist®*, *Facebook®*, and other mobile applications have been growing in popularity as conduits for transactions of goods, currency, or any type of exchange facilitated by internet services. While the City of Punta Gorda has seen very little crime resulting from this growing form of commerce as of yet, other regions in Florida and across the country have been confronted with an increase in associated crimes such as robbery and assault.

The **Safe Exchange Zone** is being offered as a proactive program aimed at deterring an escalation in such crimes. For years, the Public Safety Lobby and parking lot have been used by citizens for child custody exchanges and other related court-ordered activities.

The City of Punta Gorda Public Safety Lobby is located at 1410 Tamiami Trail, Punta Gorda, FL 33950. The facility is well lit and equipped with video surveillance cameras. The location offers an enhanced sense of security which reduces the fear of crime.

While most people who use these websites are honest and sincere in buying and selling goods, customers engaging in internet-based transactions should be aware of the financial and personal risk associated with this emerging form of commerce. These transactions are all typically civil contracts or agreements between the parties and the department is only offering the location to complete the transaction. Additionally, the exchange of weapons in the Public Safety Lobby is strictly prohibited.

Regardless of where you ultimately decide to meet individuals, following are a few tips to remember when meeting an unknown subject to buy or sell an item:



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- ✓ Tell a friend or family member where you are going and when to expect you back;
- ✓ If possible, always have someone accompany you;
- ✓ Always bring your phone with you; and
- ✓ Always meet in a public, well-lit place with a lot of people around if you chose not to use the police department.

According to Punta Gorda Police Chief Albert (Butch) Arenal, many crime-related online transactions are scam-related and do not involve face-to-face transactions. However, “If providing a venue where both parties feel safe about making hand-to-hand transactions deters this type of crime in the future, it only makes sense to be proactive in protecting our citizens,” Chief Arenal stated.

For further information about the **Safe Exchange Zone** program, please contact Lieutenant Joe King at (941) 575-5525 or at jking@pgorda.us.

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