

# WHAT RAPISTS LOOK FOR ...

## – RESPONSE TO WEB-MAIL

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### WARNING!

Always be cautious about what you read on the Internet.

Corroborate its veracity first before acting on or passing along the information.

If you receive this Web-mail in the future, feel free to circulate this Response to the others who also received it.

Send me any Web-mails like this one that you receive. I want to comment similarly on the bad ones ... and publicize the good ones.

## SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In 2000, my *Dear Safety Solutions* website received a *Web-mail* titled "What Rapists Look For ..." from three different people. It claimed to be written by a woman who'd taken a Self Defense course sponsored by her company and she wanted to pass along the information to all her female friends. Someone sent me the same *Web-mail* three years later. This time, however, it was titled "Things to Look Out For" and included a few new "tips" and it's probably still floating around the Internet. The Urban Legends website ([www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com)) characterizes this *Web-mail* as "full of dangerous, unsound information." I agree. Below is my response to the *Web-mailers*:

**THE WEB-MAIL SAID:** "The #1 thing men look for in a potential victim is hairstyle. They are most likely to go after a woman with a ponytail, bun, braid or other hairstyle that can easily be grabbed. They are also likely to go after a woman with long hair. Women with short hair are not common targets. The second thing men look for is clothing. They will look for women whose clothing is easy to remove quickly. The main outfit they look for is overalls because many of them carry scissors around to cut clothing and on overalls the straps can be easily cut off."



**Dear Safety Solutions Response:** In the more than sixteen years I've been teaching Personal Safety courses, I've never, ever heard anything about this preference of rapists for long hair or about rapists carrying around scissors to snip off clothing. In fact, all the studies I've seen stated that in stranger-to-stranger rapes (which is what's referred to in the *Web-mail*), most rapists have only a vague idea what their victims actually looked like and couldn't describe their clothing in great detail. Rape victims have all sorts of haircuts, appearances, sizes, ages, etc. It's a shame to make long-haired or overall-wearing women frightened unnecessarily.



← NOT! →





**PROBABLY NOT!**

**THE WEB-MAIL SAID:** "Grocery stores and parking lots are the prime location for rapes and that only 2% of rapists are armed when they commit the rape."

**Dear Safety Solutions Response:** What's primarily important in the location a criminal chooses for a rape is its isolation. For the majority of criminals, heavily trafficked, well-lit areas are less likely to be chosen as a crime scene. Unfortunately, the most brazen criminals (about 20%) aren't necessarily deterred by being highly visible.

**Dear Safety Solutions Response:** According to a 1995 study from U.S. Department of Justice (the last one I could find), the percentage of rapists carrying weapons when they commit the rape is about 30%.

**THE WEB-MAIL SAID:** "They [rapists] also look for women on their cell phone, searching through their purse or doing other activities while walking because they are off guard and can be easily overpowered ... always be aware of your surroundings ... if you see any odd behavior, don't dismiss it, go with your instincts. You may feel a little silly at the time, but you'd feel much worse if the guy really was trouble."

**Dear Safety Solutions Response:** I totally agree. Alertness is critical in terms of reducing your chances of being selected as a crime target and always listen to your instincts. Together they're the best early warning system you have in terms of avoiding problems.

**THE WEB-MAIL SAID:** "If you carry Pepper Spray yell 'I HAVE PEPPER SPRAY' and hold it out in front of you. He said this would be a deterrent."

**Dear Safety Solutions Response:** I agree and disagree. **Defense sprays are an excellent defensive option but never hold the spray canister in front of you when you warn the attacker to back off!** Instead of deterring the crime, you'll lose the critically important advantage of surprise, plus he'll try (possibly successfully) to take the canister away from you.

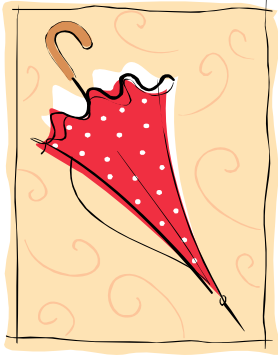
A far better strategy is to keep the defense spray in your hand but low and unobtrusive. If confronted, yell as loudly and as fiercely as you can for the assailant to back off. Extend your empty hand to delineate a "Stop-Boundary" of approximately two arms-lengths. If the assailant continues to approach and crosses your Stop-Boundary, **spray immediately and without warning.** Aim first for the eyes and face, then for his upper torso so the fumes will linger on his clothes.

Each state has different laws and regulations regarding the possession and use of defense sprays. Check with your local police before you purchase one.

Never hold the defense spray canister in front of you when you warn an attacker to back off!



You'll lose the critically important advantage of surprise.



**THE WEB-MAIL SAID:** "These men said they won't pick on women who have umbrellas, or other similar objects that can be used from a distance, in their hands." Keys are not a deterrent because you have to get really close to the attacker to use them as a weapon. So the idea is to convince these guys you're not worth it."

**👍👎 Dear Safety Solutions Response:** Agree and disagree.

The presence of keys in someone's hand isn't a crime deterrent; but I've never heard of an umbrella being a crime deterrent either—and, I don't think it is. Keys, umbrellas and other common objects found in the environment can be handy—and highly effective—as "weapons of opportunity" in a pinch; but they're unlikely to **prevent** a criminal from selecting you as a target in the first place.

The proven way to do that is to adopt a self-assured manner, confident, "non-victim" posture and respond assertively if confronted.

There's no "ALWAYS" in a crime scenario and no blanket responses. Each situation has to be evaluated individually.

**THE WEB-MAIL SAID:** "If the predator has a gun and you are not under his control, ALWAYS RUN! The predator will only hit you (a running target) four in 100 times; and even then, it most likely WILL NOT be a vital organ. RUN!"

**👎👎👎 Dear Safety Solutions Response:** This is dangerous

**advice.** Be very careful about running from a person with a gun. Law enforcement studies do indicate that a large percentage of shots miss, even at close range; but, if the shooter is very skilled, or if he runs after you shooting ... all bets are off. A safer strategy would be to look for a barrier or some kind of cover to roll under or hide behind (keep in mind that high caliber bullets can penetrate a car or door) and/or become very good at negotiating and using strategy to create a diversion and opportunity for escape.

**THE WEB-MAIL SAID:** "Most of the rapists said they'd leave a woman alone if she yelled or showed that she would not be afraid to fight back ... so if someone is coming toward you, hold out your hands in front of you and yell 'Stop' or 'Stay back!' If you put up any kind of a fight at all, they [the criminals] get discouraged ... it only takes a minute or two for them to realize that going after you isn't worth it because it will be time-consuming ... they want a woman who will not cause a lot of trouble. Start causing trouble, and he's out of there."

**👍👍👍** Most criminals do look for an "easy" victim and won't select someone they think will put up a fight. So, don't be embarrassed to yell or make a scene to attract attention if you even suspect danger. Some criminals, of course, WON'T be deterred by a strong showing and WILL call your bluff, so be prepared to do battle in that event.

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To learn how to fight effectively, take a Self Defense course at least once a year.