

# When visiting Anchorage, be safe and wise

by Paul Swetzof

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Natives coming to urban communities, particularly Anchorage, from the village face dangers which they must learn to deal with. This is especially true for Alaska Native females. A big problem is the wonderful tradition of trusting other people. Unfortunately, many people don't earn or deserve trust and its hard to know who those people are until its too late to get out of a bad situation.

Sexual molestation, including rape, of Native females is not uncommon. Another significant problem are Native women who fall under the spell of the scum of any society, pimps and drug dealers.

Native women who find themselves with little or no money, or need a ride to a relative or friends house, or who have been drinking, often find themselves asking or accepting favors from strangers or near strangers. Many of these people who are offering favors are on the prowl for vulnerable and/or naïve women and the most vulnerable women are those from the villages with little urban experience. The result is a high urban incidence of rape, molestation, physical abuse and women falling under the spell of drugs and prostitution and, or course, an increasingly high risk of getting AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

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You can do something to decrease the chances of being a victim. For beginners, be powerful and use the word NO. Make it clear to anyone and everyone that NO means NO, not yes or maybe.

Travel in groups of two or more, particularly after dark. Don't accept rides with strangers or people you haven't known for a long. If you need a ride, take a cab or bus.

Don't carry money where it can be easily seen or taken. Don't let other people see that you have money. Don't carry large sums of money or other valuables around with you. The scum of the earth, male and female, lie in wait for vulnerable people with money.

If you're intoxicated, many bars offer patrons free cab rides home (be aware there have been instances of cab drivers taking advantage of intoxicated women).

If you need help, even if you're just scared, go into a public place and call the police by dialing 911. 911 is a free call. Don't allow the dispatcher on the 911 line to hang up until she assures you a police officer is on the way. If you feel you're in danger stay on the phone with the 911 operator until the police arrive. Look out for each other and if you see someone who appears

to be in trouble call 911. If you see someone who is so intoxicated they could become victimized, dial 911 or go into a public place and ask someone to call the Community Service Patrol.

If you don't have a place to go, then go to the Alaska Native Medical Center and work on finding a place to sleep or whatever from there.

Keep away from pimps and drug dealers. They're going to try and sucker you into making money for them by prostituting yourself and giving you drugs or some percentage of what you make in return. You can safely assume many of the people you see hanging around on the streets looking like they have little to do except cause trouble are doing just that, causing trouble. Many of these characters will seem like very nice people. They're not, they're scum and they will do everything they can to bring you down to their level.

If you find yourself in a bad situation, play it by ear. Every situation is different and you don't want to get shot or stabbed. Sometimes it's appropriate to scream continuously and/or fight back and sometimes you'll have little choice but to submit in order to save yourself from serious injury or death.

Whenever possible, observe the way your attacker looks (facial features, marks, tattoos, clothes, shoes, etc.). If they have a car or some other vehicle, try and get the license number, make, model, color, etc. After the attack call the police (911) right away. Don't wash up because semen and blood samples taken from your body can help the police to catch your attacker(s). By being observant, you can help the police to put these scum in jail so they won't be able to hurt other people.

Use common sense and follow these guidelines and you will probably be safe and able to enjoy your visit to Anchorage and other urban areas. For additional information, call Standing Together Against Rape (STAR) at 563-9981 (24 hour crisis line is 563-7273), the Alaska Federation of Natives, the Alaska Inter-Tribal Council, ANS or the local police department. Any of these organizations can provide you with information on shelters, food and emergency care.