

Property Protection – Lock it up – Write it down

Year in and year out, the most prevalent crime reported in Fairfax County is theft of property. Whether the theft occurs from a vehicle, front yard, or during a residential burglary it is frustrating, costly and in many cases causes a sense of vulnerability and distress to the victim. Most property that is routinely targeted by thieves comes with a unique serial number to distinguish it from the thousands of identical items sold each year. These include electronic devices, power tools, firearms, cameras, bicycles and musical instruments. In many cases, the serial number can be the only way to identify stolen property and return it to its rightful owner. Unfortunately, in the vast majority of the cases we investigate, theft victims are unable to provide our officers with the serial numbers from their stolen property.

Development and maintenance of good personal, family and community security habits is essential for overall crime prevention. What more can individuals do to try to ensure, if a theft does happen, their property can be recovered and returned and assist in the prosecution of the perpetrators? A home/property inventory is an excellent place to start. This is a simple, yet extremely important, step in property/asset protection.

Now is the perfect time to start the tradition/habit of keeping a detailed home/property inventory. This document is personal and only kept by yourself, family and perhaps an insurance agent if you deem appropriate.

The Mount Vernon Station hopes to facilitate this type of record keeping by providing access to a spreadsheet designed just for this purpose. The home inventory list is laid out so the owner can easily list property description, its purchase price and estimated current value, specific notes about the item and a block to insert a link to a photograph. Photographs are often very important when it comes to unique or non-numbered items such as jewelry or antiques.

Our suggestion is to take an empty flash/thumb drive and dedicate it only for saving the home inventory list spreadsheet. This will ensure the document is not on your personal computer should it become compromised or stolen and will

allow you to load pictures, scans of receipts and anything else you deem pertinent to the inventory. We suggest making a couple of copies and placing them in secure locations such as a fire safe, safety deposit box or with a family member not living in the same residence. Again, these documents are very personal and are retained by you alone. The Department does not keep or store any information of this kind.

Where this helps the police is, when a theft takes place, the property owner can provide timely and precise information on the missing item. This allows for the item to be entered into the National Crime Information Center as stolen property. All pawned items must be checked against this database when someone attempts to sell or pawn an item in a licensed pawn establishment. Once in the NCIC stolen property database, if the property is ever run by any police official in the United States, it will alert that officer to its status. Our officers frequently recover what we believe to be stolen property from criminal suspects. However, if we are unable to match the specific items to a stolen property report, it is difficult to place criminal charges or return the property to its owner.

Every year, thousands of dollars of property goes unclaimed because Police Departments are unable to determine the ownership of the item. Help yourself and the police by creating a home/property inventory for your family and keeping it in a safe place – just in case.

If you would like access to the Home Inventory/Property Protection spreadsheet or if you have questions about it, or any other crime prevention questions, please contact MPO Greg Kottmann – Mount Vernon Station Crime Prevention Office – 703-360-8928 or gkotte@fairfaxcounty.gov