

Seattle Police Email Community Newsletter

October 25, 2016



Dear Community Friends,

Mail Theft

I've seen recent emails from neighbors relaying that they've had mail stolen, including from locking mail boxes. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the thefts people are reporting to each other are not being reported to police. I review incident reports and calls for police service on a daily basis, and I haven't seen police reports of the crimes neighbors are relaying to each other. Please, if you are the victim of mail theft or tampering/vandalism of your locking mail box, do report that to 911; also report it to the US Postal Inspection Service.

In light of these thefts and mail box tampering, we offer the following information from the United States Postal Inspection Service on what you can do to protect yourself from mail theft:

- Don't send cash in the mail.
- Always deposit your mail in a mail slot at your local post office, or at a metal Postal Service mailbox, or hand it to your letter carrier. **Don't leave outgoing mail unattended in your mailbox for pick up.**
- Pick up your mail promptly after delivery. **Don't leave it in your mailbox overnight.** If you're expecting checks, credit cards, or other negotiable items, ask a trusted friend or neighbor to pick up your mail.
- If you don't receive a check or other valuable mail you're expecting, contact the issuing agency immediately.
- If you change your address, immediately notify your Post Office and anyone with whom you do business via the mail.
- Tell your Post Office when you'll be out of town, so they can hold your mail until you return.
- Report all suspected mail theft to the Postal Inspector.
- Consider starting a neighborhood watch program. By exchanging work and vacation schedules with trusted friends and neighbors, you can watch each other's mailboxes (as well as homes).
- Consult with your local Postmaster for the most up-to-date regulations on mailboxes, including the availability of locked centralized or curbside mailboxes.

If you see a mail thief at work, or if you believe your mail was stolen, call police (911) immediately, then call Postal Inspectors at 877-876-2455 (press 3). You'll be asked to file a formal complaint. By analyzing information collected, Postal Inspectors may determine whether your problem is isolated or part of a larger mail theft problem in your neighborhood--and it may help Inspectors locate and apprehend the thieves. The Postal Inspection Service office that serves Washington State can be contacted at:

POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE
PO BOX 400
SEATTLE WA 98111-4000
Phone: (877) 876-2455

Mailbox Vandalism

Mailboxes are considered federal property, and federal law (Title 18, United States Code, Section 1705), makes it a crime to vandalize them (or to injure, deface or destroy any mail deposited in them). Violators can be fined up to \$250,000, or imprisoned for up to three years, for each act of vandalism.

Immediately report theft, tampering, or destruction of mail or mailboxes to your Postmaster. Obtain Label 33 from the Postal Inspection Service and affix it to your mailbox. The sticker warns that willful damage to mailboxes and theft of mail are crimes.

Keep your mailbox in good repair, and make sure it's properly installed. This may help prevent theft of the mailbox itself.

Locking Mail Boxes. There are a variety of locking mail boxes available on the market. While we cannot recommend one over another, we advise you research the various types, paying close attention to how secure and tamper resistant they are, and make the choice that best suits your needs. Consult with your local postmaster for the most up-to-date regulations on mailboxes, including the availability of locked centralized or curbside mailboxes.

Package Theft

While package theft is a year-round crime of opportunity, we are entering a time of year when we see a spike in this crime. You will start to see news broadcasts regarding package theft. Some package thieves will follow or watch for FedEx, UPS, US Mail and other delivery trucks and then target a home after a delivery is made; other thieves may just happen to see the package left at the doorstep of the home and in plain view of the street, and help themselves. Package thefts from doorsteps and front porches during the day usually increase between the months of October and January. There are steps you can take to be proactive in keeping your package safe from theft. To reduce the chances of being victimized by package delivery thieves, we offer the following advice:

Tracking and Delivery

- Track your shipment: All of the major delivery companies offer package tracking, some providing free alerts letting you know where your package is in the shipping process.
- Choose a shipping option that requires you to sign for delivery.
- Arrange to have the package shipped to another location where someone can receive it. This could be your workplace, a friend or relative's home, with a trusted neighbor, the leasing office at your apartment complex or even the local "mailbox" business that may agree to accept shipment of your item for a fee.
- Ask the delivery service to hold your package for customer pick-up at their local shipping facility.
- You can buy locking bins that your packages can be stored in safely until you return home to retrieve them. You just give the key code to the delivery company so they can store the package and use your key code to retrieve it. While locking bins are an option, it is recommended you bolt the locking bin down so that it can't be carted away. Also, be mindful that these locking bins run \$500-\$800 on average.
- If none of the above are viable options, at the very least request the package be placed in a discrete location not visible from the street.

Package Not Received or You Suspect Theft

- If you do not receive your shipment on time, check with the company of origin and confirm the delivery. If something you ordered cannot be located, contact the sender of the package to initiate a trace process. The sender will then follow up with you on the progress of your shipment.
- If the item was delivered and you did not receive it, report the theft or loss to the original company, the shipping company, and the Seattle Police Department's non-emergency line at 206-625-5011.
- Many package thefts occur during daylight hours. As always, be alert to suspicious behavior in your neighborhood, especially if you see a delivery truck making the rounds and a vehicle following behind or unfamiliar subjects on foot or on your neighbor's property. Be prepared to call 911. Your calls **do** have an impact on crime and criminals.

Delivery Company Liability

- Once the package has been delivered, whether signed for or not, it's no longer the shipping company's responsibility. Bottom line; if the package is stolen after delivery, the delivery company is not liable.

Thank you for all you do for your neighborhoods. Until next time, Take Care and Stay Safe!

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<http://www.seattle.gov/police/>

<http://www.SPDBlotter.Seattle.gov>

<http://www.seattle.gov/police/tweets/>

