

Situational Awareness and Property Inventory

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Before I announce this evening's training subject, I have a few questions to ask you. If you just got home and walked over to your radio equipment to prepare for this evening's NET and it was gone, do you have the information needed in order to file a police report or make an insurance claim? If you just returned to your car after stopping for a cup of coffee on your way to set up for Field Day and find your window broken out and your gear gone, would you have the information to be able to complete the report over the phone with the info you didn't have on scene?

This evening's training is about property inventory sheets, burglary statistics and improving your probabilities of having your property either located or compensated for in the event of a theft or disaster. I used the examples of your radio equipment, but this applies to property in your home, office, vehicle, trailer or storage unit.

I preface my training with a law enforcement background of 27 years. Catching burglars and returning property was my forte. As a young police officer, my street Sgt made it clear to me that your beat was your beat...you looked after people's property when they were at home sleeping or when they were away. You familiarized yourself with their habits...ie: leaving garage doors open partially for a cat..the broken window screen that they didn't fix...the opened back gate that always stayed open... When your beat started getting an increase in property crimes, you took it personal and started working that area hard until you caught them.

As I begin training, I will be clear that I am not criticizing current responses to property crimes that an agency may provide or not provide to these types of crimes. I know from where I retired, the current trend is that officers were no longer responding to these types of crimes and the victim was to phone in the information or complete the report into a database themselves. Someone may or may not arrive to "dust" for fingerprints or process the scene.

I am trying to provide information that may be useful in the event you find yourself a victim of a property crime.

Formally defined as “unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft”, there are over 1 million burglaries in the U.S. each year, according to the FBI. In fact, a new burglary happens every 15 seconds.

When do burglaries happen?

1. One burglary occurs every 15 seconds, averaging around 5,800 a day and 2.2 million a year.
2. Most burglaries happen between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.
3. Burglars tend to avoid homes with security systems.
4. The majority of break-ins are committed by people who live in the same area.
5. Most criminals can burglarize a home in less than 10 minutes.
6. Almost 30% of burglars enter a home through an unlocked door or window.
7. 34% of burglars enter through the front door.
8. Burglars usually go to the master bedroom first.
9. On average the monetary amount of property lost during a burglary is \$2,251.
10. Homes without security systems are up to 300% more likely to be broken into.

Common burglary tactics and targets

Property with high resale value isn't the only thing that's commonly stolen. Household items that can be transported quickly, easily and with little trace to the burglar are targeted, too.

The most common items burglars take from homes are:

1. Easily taken and leaves little trace.
2. Firearms.
3. Prescription drugs.
4. Electronics such as phones or laptops.
5. Jewelry or other high-value personal items, such as furs.

Why is it important to make a home inventory?

Creating a home inventory of valuable belongings and investments is an essential precaution every homeowner should take. The stress of a burglary, fire or other home emergency can make it difficult, if not impossible to remember all of the items in your home that may have been stolen or damaged in the process.

Start your home inventory *now*

If you're just setting up a household, starting a home inventory is relatively simple. If you've been living in the same house for many years, however, the task of creating a list can seem daunting—but it doesn't have to be.

Pick an easy spot to start – A contained area—like your small kitchen appliance cabinet, your sporting equipment closet or your handbag shelf

List recent purchases – Another way to start is with recent purchases—get into the inventory habit and then go back tackle your older possessions.

Don't forget off-site items – Inventory your belongings kept in a self-storage facility too.

Don't get overwhelmed – Once you've started your inventory, keep going even if you can't get it all done immediately. It's better to have an incomplete inventory than nothing at all.

Your inventory can be as simple as a written list, pictures or video. Or use a home inventory app to help you compile your list. It doesn't have to be anything fancy but a means to be able to recall the information if you need it. A few sheets of paper with the important information for each item written on them that are then scanned and saved onto a thumb drive or sent to an email file will work. You can get as fancy and expensive as hiring an agency to come in and do it for you.

A good home inventory should have the following information:

- A description of the item, including the make and model (if applicable)
- Estimated value of the item
- Purchase date
- Receipts
- Serial number
- Photos/videos of the items
- Was the item engraved, UV marked....with what identifiers?

Speaking of engraving. Property engraving or "Operation Identification" is a crime prevention program which involves the marking of property with an identifying number as a means of discouraging burglary and theft. The citizen uses an electric engraving pen or some type of etching tool to mark their Driver's License Number on the property. Even a paint marking pen can be used.

One night shift, I was patrolling the business district as there was an increase of burglaries occurring. I came across a known burglar to me. He was carrying an armful of property when I saw him. He jettisoned the property and ran. I caught him and returned to the property. One item was a Jam Box. The jam box had a serial number on it and a driver's license engraved on it. The serial number did not show it to be listed as stolen. The driver's license number was checked and then license holder was contacted. They said they owned the jam box, but it was in their office which was located a block away. Dispatch then advised that the burglar alarm company was now reporting a silent break in alarm at that same location. It was found the building had been burglarized.

I mention this as to point out that if you do engrave an item, use your state driver's license or identification card number and not your SSN. SSN information is not readily available as the DL information. Use the exact State abbreviation as well as to avoid confusion. I spray paint stencil my last name on my larger garage tool items. A thief may choose to leave that item behind because they don't want to be caught with it.

Where Should You Store Your Inventory?

Whatever format you prefer for your inventory, it's best to create at least one back-up copy. No matter what, never store the only copy of your inventory in your home or on your computer or other device. If you're not using a home inventory app, documents can be stored with Google Docs, Dropbox, or another cloud-based digital file. In short, you'll want to make sure you store all photos and videos in a private account on a photo or video sharing service that can be accessed on more than one device. (You won't want to lose the only copy of your home inventory in a house fire!) If you don't want to open a cloud-based account, you can also simply email the files to yourself. Hard copies of documents and photos, as well as CDs and flash drives, can be kept in a safe deposit box or with a friend you trust or relative who lives some distance from you.

On one occasion, I responded to a burglary call. The victim let me know that they had completed inventory sheets and they were saved on file on their compute. The computer was stolen, no copies saved electronically or by hard copy. Argggghh...

So, how does this work then?

Should you have to make a report, provide the necessary information. Days gone by in my early career, these property reports of stolen items had to be entered by data processing personnel. There was a back log. Fast forward now to the day of the information being uploaded quickly and the stolen item (s) being entered into NCI/TCIC. This can depend on the agency/jurisdiction and its capabilities.

Should the item be located and the NCIC/TCIC search be initiated by law enforcement, the item will show as being stolen along with the information from the originating agency. Pawn shops are also required to record serial numbers and stolen items are often recovered this way.