

I. L. Skills workshop: Theft Prevention & Personal Safety

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Guest Speaker:

Constable Steven Hartwick – London Police Service

How can you prove an attendant is stealing?

Installation of a camera is one possibility. It is not illegal to record people without their knowledge, but the footage can't be used in court as evidence. You can put up a sign indicating cameras are present, but you must make sure the cameras are function, or you may be sued for presenting a false sense of safety. You should be the only person who has access to the video footage (you can set it up to be sent to a remote computer, where you can review it when there are no workers in your home). It is important to tell workers that you have cameras as a precaution (eg. "I do not have a problem with you, but I have had problems in the past, so the cameras are to help protect myself). Remind them that the cameras will also capture them NOT stealing, to prove their innocence if that is the case.

Installing an alarm system is another possibility. An alarm system can give you peace of mind at the very least. If your system includes a mobile phone app, and your phone is lost or stolen, be sure to call your phone company and security company to cancel the app immediately!

Prevention is really your best option.

What are some preventative steps to take?

Collect your valuable in one place, where they can be secured and monitored by you. Ensure the items are visible to you while the worker is in your home. Or use a box with a lock, if the items will fit inside. A cash box is a simple and affordable solution. You could even place some cat toys inside the box so that it makes noise to let you know if someone is moving it.

In order to report a theft, you must know what specific items were taken, and the items must be identifiable.

To report a specific individual, you must be able to prove that it was them alone who had access to the items that have gone missing. The police assume

everyone is a suspect until they can prove otherwise, so if you have had many people in your house recently, they will all need to be considered possible suspects.

Personal information should be protected at all times.

Your Social Insurance Number (SIN) is only needed on certain occasions. If you can memorize the number, than you don't need to carry the card around and you can secure it in a safe place, such as a lock box.

If you use your SIN regularly (eg. students), it is okay to keep the card in your wallet, but be sure to report and cancel the card immediately if your wallet is ever lost or stolen.

If a worker helps you with applications or paperwork where personal information is recorded, try to limit the number of workers who do this with you, so that less people have access to your personal information.

Confidential documents that you do not need anymore should be shredded.

When cutting up old cards, be sure to cut lengthways across the identification numbers before cutting into smaller pieces. Put the pieces into different garbage bins throughout your house so they are not easily put back together.

Passwords should be changed regularly (one suggestion is every 6 months). Be sure you stay away from passwords that use any birthdays or names of yourself or people close to you, as these are easily guessed. Be sure to change any Personal Identification Numbers (PINs) or passwords if you think they have been compromised – especially if an attendant who had access to those numbers was fired or moved on to a new job.

Emails claiming to have money for you, or requesting money or personal information from you are scams. Delete them.

DO NOT post on social media when you will be away from home. This lets people know that your house will be empty and invites robbers.

To dismiss a worker, you do not necessarily need proof that they are stealing from you.

You can simply let them know that you are unhappy with their services and no longer wish to have them in your home.

If you do suspect theft, you can ask them if they “know anything about _____ that has gone missing” and see what their reaction is like. However, if you are going to claim them and report them, you must have proof. DO NOT threaten a worker with calling the police or firing them if you do not have proof that they have stolen from you! If you do have proof (eg. video footage) you can show it to them and make a deal that you will not call police if they return your property, but do not allow them to keep working for you.

To protect the larger items in your home that are often stolen (eg. electronic equipment – stereos, tvs, laptops, cameras etc.) be sure to record the serial numbers, make, model, and value at the time of purchase. It does no good to have all this information on a computer file if the computer gets stolen. PRINT it off and store it somewhere safe.

Collectibles can usually be marked in some way by you to make them identifiable, if they do not already have a serial number. For example, using a small dot of nail polish on the bottom. Take a picture of the item, with the marking and keep it for later identification (a good place to store it is with the list of serial numbers for other items, or with the certificate of authenticity).

Items of sentimental value are less likely to be stolen because they may not be worth much money to a seller. It is still a good idea to mark these items in some way. Writing a unique number on the bottom is a good option, but be sure to use the same number for all the items you mark. To make the number unique but still memorable, you could use a chunk of another number (eg. last 3 digits of your SIN, or first 4 digits of your driver’s license). It is also good to subtly mention these items to your workers, so that they know you look at the item frequently and would notice if it went missing.

Keep credit cards in metal cases – this will prevent scanners from stealing your information. Limit the number of credit cards you have so that it is easier to keep track of your spending patterns and companies will let you know of anything

unusual. Always read your credit card statements to see if there are any unusual purchases.

If shopping online, it is best to set up a paypal account because it gives more protection for your personal banking information. To set it up you must use a bank account, but then you can switch over to a credit card so that transactions are easy to follow on your monthly statements.

If you are struggling against a large company for billing you don't agree with or accounts that have been hacked, call the Ombudsman.