

The persistent problem of people stealing things that don't belong to them is nothing new, and unfortunately, continues to be the most frequently reported crime in Benton County. Today, I'd like to focus on one particular object that seems to be a favorite among thieves, trailers. Whether we are talking about cargo trailers, flatbed trailers, boat trailers, fish houses, or RVs, these portable vehicles are often stolen because they are easy to transport from the scene, easy to disguise, and easy to sell. The bad news is that any security measure can be overcome by a determined thief, but the good news is there are a number of things that can be done to discourage a would-be thief and convince them to move on to another target.

As I said, one of the attractive things about stealing a trailer is how mobile they are. The first line of defense is to make it as difficult as possible to move the trailer. Trailer owners can purchase a number of locking devices to keep trailers from being towed away. Devices that lock the tongue are designed to make it impossible for the thief to attach the trailer to a hitch. These devices can be purchased for as little as \$10. Generally, the more you are willing to spend on this kind of device, the more difficult it will be for a thief to defeat it. A chain and padlock is another good solution to securing a trailer in place. Some owners chain the frame of their trailer to a fixed object while others run a chain through the trailer's wheels. This strategy is only as good as the quality of the chain and padlock used to secure the chain. Using cut-resistant, high grade chain and hardened padlocks will deter many would-be thieves. Wheel locks are another solution to securing a trailer in place. These devices serve the same purpose as the "boot" that a law enforcement agency might put on an illegally parked car. They lock onto the wheel and prevent it from turning. They start at around \$50 and, like the tongue lock, generally become more difficult to defeat as their price tag increases. Another strategy, particularly if the trailer is going to be parked for a while, is to remove a wheel (or two wheels from the same side if it is a tandem axle trailer) and place the trailer axle on some kind of block.

The place you choose to park your trailer will also influence how vulnerable it is to theft. A trailer that must be parked outside should be parked in an area that is well lit and easily seen to deter thieves. Parking trailers inside outbuildings and out of sight also helps keep away thieves. Parking the trailer behind other vehicles, with the tongue against a wall or fixed object, or any other strategy that makes it difficult to move will serve as a deterrent.

Finally, technology has some solutions to offer. GPS trackers can be purchased for as little as \$30 and installed on your trailer. These GPS trackers have the ability to provide you with the location of your trailer in real time. Many also offer the ability to program a "geo-fence" and alert you on a smart phone or other internet-connected device when the tracker moves outside of this pre-determined area. For those who go down this route, you would be wise to follow the installation instructions included with the device while also keeping concealment in mind. A GPS device will only be valuable as long as it remains undiscovered and attached to the trailer.

Regardless of what strategies you choose to employ to secure your trailers, make it as difficult as possible for a thief and you will increase your odds of being able to enjoy using your trailer for years to come.

For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: http://www.co.benton.mn.us/County_Sheriff/crime_prevention.php. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.