

Theft and burglary remain two of the most commonly reported crimes in Benton County. Having property stolen leaves victims feeling violated and powerless as they come to grips with the feeling that they will never see their property again. According to the 2017 Minnesota Uniform Crime Report, \$86,800,000 in property was reported stolen statewide in theft and burglary crimes. According to this same report, about 22% of stolen property was recovered by police in 2017. However, you can tip the odds of recovery in your favor. Recording serial numbers and providing those numbers to law enforcement when property is stolen increases the likelihood of your property being recovered. Armed with a serial number, law enforcement can enter your stolen property into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) stolen items database. The NCIC database was created in 1967 to aid law enforcement in recovering stolen property, finding wanted individuals, and locating missing persons. Law enforcement officers from across the country routinely run serial number checks against this database when there is a suspicion that property may be stolen. As a law enforcement officer, receiving an NCIC "hit" on an item suspected of being stolen is a highlight to your day. Often this means that a suspect is arrested and a victim has their property returned to them. As of 2015, NCIC averaged 12.6 million transactions per day. Law enforcement also has ever-improving access to pawn shop records and online marketplaces. Having serial numbers or complete descriptions (such as make, model, or a photograph) of stolen property is very important when searching through the multitude of pawned items and used property offered for sale on line.

Just like every other aspect of modern life, there are apps to help you track serial numbers. A quick visit to the App Store or Google Play will yield apps that make recording and storing these important numbers much easier. Some of these apps are completely free to use while others offer limited features for users of the free services and enhanced features for those willing to pay for the app or a subscription. In addition to recording serial numbers, some of these apps allow users to take and store photos of their property. As with any other app, be certain that the app you chose is from a trusted source and appears to have generally positive reviews. You should also pay attention to the permissions the app requires on your device to ensure that the app doesn't compromise your data.

Regardless of how you track serial numbers and document your property, make sure to record this information and keep it in a safe place should you ever be the victim of a theft or burglary. It is very easy to assume that becoming a victim is something that will happen to someone else and to hope you will never need serial numbers or descriptions of your property. However, in the event you do become a victim, you will consider the small amount of time invested in documenting this information time well spent.

For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.