

For as long as people have had things of value, there have been a small number of other people who are willing to take those things of value for their own. Theft continues to be one of the five most often reported crimes in Benton County. Theft is typically a crime of opportunity that happens when a criminal is presented with circumstances allowing him or her to easily take something of value for their own. There are only two ways to prevent theft from affecting your world. You can either chose to not own anything of value or do your level-best to make your items of value difficult to detect, access, and steal.

All too often, criminals acquire their ill-gotten goods because these items are on display for anyone to see. Because most people are honest and law-abiding, most people would think little of seeing valuables left in plain sight in a vehicle, recreational vehicles left outside in plain sight, or tools lying out in a pickup bed. To a criminal, these all represent an opportunity to further their criminal lifestyle. As you are going about your everyday life, do your best to evaluate each situation for the opportunity it presents to thieves. If you see opportunity, conceal or better secure property to remove the opportunity and send thieves elsewhere.

Once you've done your best to keep valuables out of sight, take a moment to make sure those valuables are locked up. Lock your vehicles, lock your homes, lock your outbuildings, and lock your trailers. Use whatever means you can to make it as difficult as possible to get into or at these valuables. It may be inconvenient and sometimes seem unnecessary, but the more difficult you make it for the thief, the more likely the thief is to move on to an easier target.

Theft prevention technology has a place in your personal crime prevention strategy as well. Whether it is something low-tech like motion sensing outdoor lights and a trail camera or something more advanced like GPS trackers or a security/surveillance system, these technological advances can help prevent theft or assist in catching those responsible. The presence of security devices alone may be enough to convince a thief to move along. Having a clear and high-quality image of a suspect or suspect vehicle can be a quality lead in any theft investigation. High quality images combined with the crowd sourcing power of traditional media and social media has contributed to the solving of many recent cases. Any type of GPS or tracking technology present in stolen items greatly enhances the ability of law enforcement to recover your stolen property. GPS tracking devices that can be attached to an increasing number of valuables can be found for relatively modest prices online.

Finally, consider that thieves need to have an environment free of detection in which to operate. If the thief believes someone will see him or her and call law enforcement, the thief is less likely to strike in that area. Forming neighborhood watch groups or calling law enforcement right away when you see suspicious activity deprives the thief of his or her preferred environment. Getting to know your neighbors and reporting suspicious behavior will pay dividends for everyone in the community.

Of course, the best time to put all this into practice is before a thief pays a visit. Take a few moments to consider how you might be able to better protect the things valued by you and your neighbor from those who would seize the opportunity to make them their own.

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.