

Online shopping is predicted to grow by leaps and bounds in 2020. Whether driven by COVID concerns, convenience, or special pricing, more people are expected to shop online this year, especially during the holiday season. Adobe Analytics has predicted online sales in November and December of 2020 will increase by 33% when compared to the same time period in 2019. All this online shopping is sure to keep parcel delivery services busy bringing packages to homes all over the area.

Unfortunately, right in the wake of these delivery trucks is sure to be those most grinch-like of thieves, the porch pirates. Trolling the streets, they look for unattended packages and help themselves to whatever might be concealed inside these cardboard treasure chests. A recent study done at Middle Tennessee State University¹ took an in-depth look at incidents of package theft that were captured on video. The purpose of this study was to determine how most package thieves conducted their crimes and discover ways in which package theft might be prevented. The study found that most stolen packages were located within 25 feet of a roadway and that 93% of the packages stolen were visible from the street. Most thieves made the approach to a target package alone and seemed unconcerned with fences, cameras, or other security devices at the home. Most thieves left the area immediately after committing the theft, almost always in a vehicle. The study's recommendations for prevention centered around removing the opportunity for theft by either concealing the package or limiting the amount of time the package was unsecured and visible.

The surest way to prevent package theft is to have your package delivered at a time or to a place where someone will be there to accept it. Some delivery services offer the option of scheduling a delivery date and time. Scheduling a delivery when someone will be home to accept the package will keep the box out of reach of these looting thieves. Delivering packages to a local retail branch or to a secure locker location is another option to keep thieves away. If neither of those options will work for your package, consider having the package delivered to your workplace or a family member or friend who you know will be home.

For those packages that cannot be delivered to a secure location, concealment is your next best option. Many delivery services offer the ability to provide delivery instructions to the driver. Use these delivery instructions to specify a place at your home that the package could be left where it will not be visible from the road. Inside a garage or shed, in a locker outside the home, or in the backyard out of view would be good concealment options. When deciding where you would like a package to be left, pick a

¹ Ben Stickle, Melody Hicks, Amy Stickle & Zachary Hutchinson (2020) Porch pirates: examining unattended package theft through crime script analysis, *Criminal Justice Studies*, 33:2, 79-95, DOI: [10.1080/1478601X.2019.1709780](https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2019.1709780)

place that will conceal it from the prying eyes of trolling thieves while keeping in mind the demands the request places upon the driver.

Finally, be alert for suspicious vehicles in neighborhoods. Vehicles seen following or watching delivery trucks should be reported to local law enforcement promptly. Be alert for vehicles driving slowly through residential areas, especially if it appears that the driver or passenger are checking each house for packages. Suspicious vehicles or people seen taking packages from homes should be reported to law enforcement right away. We ask that the public be good witnesses by getting video, photographs, or vehicle license plate numbers. Chasing suspected thieves or intervening in a theft in progress is not recommended. No package is worth someone being harmed.

Keep packages out of sight or your online purchases might end up as porch pirate plunder. For more crime prevention 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.