

Office Theft Prevention

"Office Creeper" Incidents on the Rise

The back door to a building was propped open so that the smokers could slip in and out. A "delivery person" walked in that door around lunchtime with a large box. He then went cubicle to cubicle loading up laptops until his box was full, walked out the front door of the building, and the receptionist held the door for him... A man walked into an office, chatted to workers and joined them for lunch. Nobody noticed when he left with four stolen laptops... Police stopped a woman who was nearly nine months pregnant as she left one workplace and found a laptop strapped to her belly... A thief walked into a company during business hours, hid until everyone left and then took about a dozen laptops and smart phones.

These acts are the work of a new kind of criminal called the "office creeper." Dressed to fit into the hustle and bustle of busy workplaces, they hide in plain sight and can cost an individual business an average of \$60,000 each year. That cost can rise quickly if you consider the loss of intellectual property. According to the

FBI, less than 2% of the lost or stolen laptops are ever recovered.

What can you do to prevent office creepers? There are many steps you can take, such as:

- Encourage individuals to become familiar with their co-workers and other occupants so they can identify an individual who is out of place
- If someone seems to be wandering the halls or casually roaming about, ask questions like, "May I help you find someone?"
- If visitors must wear a badge, security should be notified immediately if someone is walking around without proper identification.
- Separate your personal keys and office keys to minimize the damage if they are stolen.
- Coat racks near doorways make it easy for a thief to snatch items from the outside. Consider moving it to a location further in the room.
- If your laptop is equipped with a Universal Security Slot, consider

purchasing an inexpensive laptop cable to secure your laptop.



- A persistent ringing phone is a clue that your office is empty. When leaving your office, transfer calls to voicemail.
- Accurately inventory all office equipment, furniture and devices. Keep a list in a locked, fireproof cabinet and consider having a duplicate copy elsewhere.
- Mark all of your devices like laptops and smart phones with clear ID.
- Never share keys or access codes with ANYONE. Likewise, don't leave your office keys unattended.
- Make sure confidential files are secure at all times.

A Few More Tips...

Here are some additional precautions you can use to prevent burglary, theft, or vandalism:

- Watch out for "head poppers" who open the wrong doors and pretend to be looking for a specific office or person. If they act nervous or head immediately for the exit, remember their description, and call security.
- Lock all offices, conference rooms, or storage rooms that are regularly unoccupied.
- Be discreet - don't advertise vacation plans or absences by you or your co-workers when there is a stranger present in the office.
- When working after business hours, keep your doors locked. Notify security of your presence and what hours you will be working.
- If you are the last to leave at night, secure all computer systems, critical files, and copiers. If you use any electrical appliances, make sure they are turned off and unplugged. Also, make sure to close and lock all doors and windows and activate alarm systems if present.

Test Your Theft Prevention IQ...

To find out how "office smart" you are about preventing office thefts, take the following short quiz developed by the USDA. Check the answer(s) you think are correct. Following the quiz are some hints that will help you and your co-workers cut down on crime in the workplace.

- 1. If you leave your office, what should you do with your purse or wallet? What about other valuables?**
 - a. Put your purse under your desk or your wallet in your jacket pocket and hang it on the coat rack.
 - b. Keep your purse or wallet with you or locked in a secure drawer or cabinet.
 - c. Carry extra cash and credit cards with you.
- 2. When something happens in the office - a theft or a burglary, or an act of vandalism, what should you do?**
 - a. Nothing, it's not your problem.
 - b. Call the local police.
 - c. Follow the emergency procedures for your building.
- 3. If you'll be away from your desk for a few minutes, or out of the office for lunch, what is the best procedure to follow?**
 - a. Shut and lock your office door; let the telephone ring.
 - b. Arrange for someone to sit at your desk and answer the phone.
 - c. Leave the door open and forward your calls to another office.
- 4. To always know where office/personal money, credit cards, and travel authorizations are, you should:**
 - a. Keep change or cash out of sight in a desk drawer.
 - b. Leave the coffee fund jar next to the coffeepot.
 - c. Lock all money in a secure desk or cabinet.
- 5. If you discover that something is missing from your office - like equipment, a purse, or a coat - what steps should you take?**
 - a. Call the local police and explain in detail what is missing.
 - b. Call the building manager or send them a memo.
 - c. In DC, call the FBI and report the missing items.
- 6. When a repair-person shows up to work on equipment in the office, or to remove equipment for repair or replacement, what should you do?**
 - a. Welcome the repair-person, it's probably been weeks since you called.
 - b. Ask for company identification - unless the repair-person is wearing a uniform.
 - c. While the work is being done, go for coffee.
- 7. What is a good method of keeping track of your office equipment and furniture?**
 - a. Leave all small equipment on top of your desk or a file cabinet so you can see if anything is missing.
 - b. Mark identifying numbers or symbols on equipment and furniture.
 - c. Keep a list of all equipment serial numbers and furniture in a safe place.
- 8. What's the best way to remember the unclassified safe and vault combinations or computer passwords for your office?**
 - a. Write them on a slip of paper and tape it to the phone.
 - b. Type the combinations or passwords on an index card and tape it to the side of the safe or computer.
 - c. Memorize the combinations and passwords.
- 9. How can you guard against losing your office keys?**
 - a. Put the keys on a ring, with an identifying tag giving name, address, and room number.
 - b. Carry all your office keys and personal keys on one ring.
 - c. Always keep your office keys in the same location on top of your desk or in the top drawer.
- 10. Which of the following should you report to your property manager to prevent crime in or near the building?**
 - a. Broken or flickering lights; dimly lit corridors, stairways and restrooms; unlighted parking lot areas.
 - b. Doors and windows that won't lock or broken glass panes.
 - c. Overgrown shrubbery near doorways.

1. Answer: "b" is the correct answer for the first part of the question.

Many people "hide" their valuables under their desk or in a file drawer or believe their wallets are safe in their jacket pockets or briefcases. Desks, jackets, and briefcases are often the first place thieves look! Make sure to locate coat racks away from entrances or exits to minimize temptation. As for other "valuables" treat them the same as you would cash. The best location for extra credit cards, excess cash, and checkbooks is at home. When you think about the time it would take to replace your driver's license, credit cards, checkbook - a few minutes of caution could save you hours of hassles.



2. Answer: "c" is the correct answer.

Find out who has the responsibility for emergencies in your building, and keep an Emergency Calls list near your phone. "a" is never correct - crime in the work place is a problem for everyone, just because you were not directly affected, doesn't mean you won't be next. "b" isn't the wrong answer, but many emergency plans ensure that everyone that needs to know receives the information as well.

If you see a burglary, a theft or vandalism in progress:

- Stay calm, do not try to confront the person, especially if you are alone
- Call the appropriate authority immediately
- Jot down a description of the person you saw. Important things to remember are: height, weight, race, age, hair color and haircut, complexion, facial hair, eyeglasses, color of eyes, scars or unusual marks.
- Describe clothing, jewelry, any weapon, and if a vehicle was used, its color, make, and license number
- Information on the direction of escape may help law officers find the thief or the stolen goods

3. Answer: "b" is the best procedure to follow.

If you volunteer to return the favor, you shouldn't have much difficulty finding someone to help. Another good answer would be a combination of the first part of "a" with the last part of "c". If you simply lock the door and allow phones to go unanswered, it alerts potential thieves that your office is unoccupied. If the phone system allows, call forward to a neighboring office or activate the voice mail or answering machine. Even if you're only going to be gone for a few minutes, and you cannot find someone to office-sit, forward your calls and lock the door. It only takes one lapse of a few minutes to present an opportunity to a thief.

4. Answer: "c" is the correct procedure.

Never leave money, credit cards, travel documents, or anything else of value in an unlocked desk or cabinet. Why take chances on something disappearing? If you have a coffee fund or office kitty that starts to add up to real money, open a credit account. Never post a sign with the name of the person responsible for collecting the money - that leads the thieves to the right desk.

5. Answer: "a or b" answers may be correct depending on your building.

Always make sure you report anything stolen. Check with your property manager to find out where to report thefts in your building. Try to remember the last time you saw the item and its location. Describe the item thoroughly. If it is marked with an identification number or symbol, let the officer know the specifics.

6. Answer: None of the above.

Answer "b" is only partially correct. Make it a habit to visually inspect id badges, a uniform alone is not enough. Sometimes id tags are displayed around the neck - check them out. "a" is up to you to how you react. "c" is always wrong; never leave the repair-person in your office alone, even if it is someone you are familiar with. Always check the identification of a stranger who comes into your office to do repair or other service work. If

deemed necessary, call the repair company or ask for a signed work order specifying the location and who authorized the work. Do not allow property to be removed without a written order or a receipt including the company's name, address, and phone number, plus the name of the authorizing person. Before the equipment actually leaves the premises, verify the repair request with the person who authorized it. Never allow unauthorized repairs to alarm systems or communications equipment. Always check these work requests carefully and verify with the appropriate parties.

7. Answer: "Both b and c" are correct answers.

Prominently mark all office equipment and furniture using a non-removable method. Model number and serial number should be prominently displayed on equipment indicating traceability of the items. Mark personal property as well using initials and/or an identifying number or tag. Markings can be made using engraving pens, non-removable decals, or paint. Check with local suppliers to find specialized labels or decals that are difficult to remove and require scraping. Most thieves will not bother with an item that requires a lot of work before it can be resold. Keep an up-to-date written inventory of your office furniture and computers and equipment in a separate secure location. For each item list make and model, serial numbers, a thorough description, and how and where the item was marked. Perform regular inventories of equipment and furniture, especially that which is not used on a daily basis. Remember, never store unused equipment on top of cabinets, under tables or in other isolated areas. Lock equipment in a cabinet and make sure all items are identified. Invest in a lock box for office keys and give the key to a trusted employee. For added security attach larger equipment (computer or printer) to the desk or table with a locking device.

8. Answer: "c" is the best answer.

You should also have a backup system for use when a co-worker is on leave or moves to a new job and no one remembers the combinations or passwords. The best way to do this is to write or type the unclassified safe or vault combinations and computer passwords on a piece of paper and put it inside a folder. Label the folder with the employee's name or code and place the folder in a lockable file cabinet.

9. Answer: None of the answers are correct.

Never put an identifying tag on a key ring - if you lose your keys it's an open invitation to thieves. Keep your office keys on a separate key ring or on one half of a snap ring, and your personal keys on another key ring, or the other half of the snap key ring. Do not tag your personal keys either - that leads thieves right to your doorstep. Don't leave keys unattended on your desk, under a video screen or in an unlocked drawer, where they can easily be "borrowed" and duplicated. Never put office, car, or house keys in your coat and then leave it hanging on a coat rack or draped over a chair. Keep office and personal keys with you or else lock them up. Only lend your keys to persons who have a legitimate need - make sure they are returned promptly. If you discover your keys are missing, call your property manager.

10. Answer: "a, b and c" are all correct.

As a further crime deterrent, set up a notification system with your property manager to provide prompt responses to any potentially dangerous conditions. Use common sense when reporting areas in and around the building that may pose hazards. If the condition warrants immediate attention, use the phone, if it is more of a long term issue, a memo or e-mail message may serve better.

