Protect yourself against mail theft in Bellevue

CRIME PREVENTION: BELLEVUE POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Each year, Americans trust the U.S. Postal Service with billions of letters and packages, and the vast majority of those arrive safely at their intended destinations. But there are always thieves who will target the mail. Mail theft puts your personal information at risk for trading on online black-market sites or through direct use by criminals who have it in hand. Here are a few prevention tips to avoid just this.

- Check your mail daily: Make a daily routine out of collecting your mail — even if you aren't necessarily expecting something. Keep in mind: even a simple utility bill is valuable to an identity thief. The more time you leave your mailbox full, the longer a scammer has to grab it. Be proactive and consider alternative delivery methods when placing online orders. Consider having packages delivered to a different location if you know you will not be home. You could also request packages to be delivered to a trusted neighbor.

- Plan for being away: If you will be away for more than a couple of days, designate someone you trust to pick up your mail or contact the Post Office to arrange for a vacation hold, where your mail will be held at the post office until you personally pick it up when you return. Likewise, if you're going to be away at work all day when you're expecting a package delivery, consider asking a trustworthy neighbor to take it to their house until you return home.

- Rethink what you are mailing: Never send cash or gift cards, as they are next to impossible to reclaim and are particularly sought after. Checks are also a target, as they can be washed and reused by scammers or sought after for the account numbers printed at the bottom.

- Go paperless when possible: This will decrease the amount of sensitive information being sent to you via mail. If your bank, credit card company, utility company, etc. offer electronic copies of your statements or bills rather than mailing them to you, do yourself a favor and take them up on the offer.

- Don't leave outgoing mail in your mailbox: Deposit mail in a mail slot in the post office building, at a Postal Service mailbox, or hand it to your letter carrier. This way, you can be certain that your sensitive items are not vulnerably sitting in a mailbox awaiting

collection. Items sitting in a residential mailbox with the red flag up are especially attractive to mail thieves.

- Secure your mailbox: A secure mailbox or mail slot, well-lit surroundings, and a visible home surveillance system can create a triple threat against any unexpected guests who may be after your mail. Should lighting or a surveillance system be impossible due to your mailbox's rural placement, consider upgrading your mailbox to include a locking mechanism; your mail carrier simply slides your mail into the slot.

- Know what you are expecting: The Post Office offers Informed Delivery, which allows you to digitally preview incoming mail through scanned images of the exterior address side of letter-sized mail. Visit the USPS Informed Delivery website to sign up for the program free of charge. If you are expecting to receive checks or sensitive information regularly, consider getting a post office box.
https://informeddelivery.usps.com/box/pages/intro/start.action

- Opt-out of junk mail: Pre-approved credit card applications lie at the heart of the intricate relationship between mail theft and identity theft. Call toll-free 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (1-888-567-8688) or visit optoutprescreen.com, and you can choose not to receive unsolicited offers for new credit cards and insurance.

- Report mail theft immediately: Remember, mail theft is a federal offense, punishable by up to five years in prison and a $250,000 fine. If you believe you were a victim of mail theft, report the incident to both local law enforcement and the Post Office.

https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/police/report-and-prevent-crime/report-a-crime-online

https://www.uspis.gov/report/