

PORCH PIRATES



The number of package theft cases in our country has been skyrocketing, with a whopping 1 in 4 Canadians having a package stolen. Rising numbers are prevalent because more online sales mean more deliveries, and thieves know they can get away with it.

Package theft is a crime of opportunity in which parcels are snatched in the time between delivery at the door and retrieval of the package from the door. Delivery drivers, consumers, and retailers need to work together to prevent the loss of sometimes heartbreaking packages.

Here's what to keep in mind when preparing for a package delivery:

- Require signature on delivery to ensure the delivery person gives the package to you directly.
- Buy a porch lock box that can allow deliveries to be left in a secure area.

- Have the order delivered to an alternate location, such as your workplace or a neighbour who will be home to accept the package directly.

- Get to know your delivery drivers.
- Pay via credit card, which offers theft insurance.
- Keep the tracking number private.
- Small packages are most likely targets as they are both easier to steal and more likely to contain high-value technology.

- If you regularly purchase from a vendor such as Amazon, rent a self-service locker from the vendor for more security. Generally, Amazon has reimbursement recourse for theft as well- be sure to check before you buy.

- Have a camera at your door. It is not likely to deter thieves, but it will help police and social media identify the thieves later.

Porch pirates have been getting smarter and bolder. In June 2024, a homeowner in Columbus, Ohio captured video footage of a package thief stealing a small box mere seconds after the package was placed on the ground. Police report some suspects are getting access to tracking numbers to pinpoint when and where packages are being dropped off. Other porch pirates follow delivery vehicles and take the parcel if no one comes to the door to retrieve it.

Thieves may decide to keep or resell loot from packages in online markets, or they may have contacts who are likely to purchase the items from them.

In 2018, YouTuber Mark Rober took the punishment of porch pirates into his own hands and created the infamous Glitterbomb to catch porch pirates in the act. His glitterbomb was disguised as a parcel and left out on various porches as bait. The box contains multiple phones inside, which would record audio and video as well as provide tracking info. Upon opening the box, a spinning device would spray glitter into the porch pirate's face, douse their home or car with stinky liquid, or scare them with a harmless countdown that makes them ditch the box so Rober and his team can retrieve it. Rober continued periodically making glitter bombs for 3 years, compiling the results into a series of Glitterbomb videos that revealed an industry of porch pirates who steal packages and what happens after packages are stolen.

True Stories of Inconvenience and Heartbreak

"My mom sent us a box of hand-sewn Christmas

presents and a card to my townhouse complex. I had a tracking number and had been anticipating paying duty fees, but the delivery person dropped the parcel off at my door at around 9 am. On my way home at about 5 pm, I received a text message from a neighbor saying they'd found my parcel opened up nearby. The packaging was scattered and it looked like a pile of trash. The thieves left the card and the tins serving as wrapping paper, but took the hats and cat toys my mom had made. I'm grateful I was able to recover some of the contents, but my mom was heartbroken that the hats were stolen."

"I filed a report with EPS and contacted Canada Post. Canada Post called me and after some initial confusion, they realized the delivery person was new. The area has a high rate of parcel theft and they try not to leave parcels at the door. My unit faces the parking lot and the doorstep is quite visible from the sidewalk, so it was definitely a crime of opportunity. In the future I will get all parcels sent to my partner's place of work instead, but it's frustrating to have to plan around other people being awful."

In Montreal, two alleged porch pirates were apprehended in June and found in possession of packages stolen from a residential building. The suspects are facing theft charges and are believed to have been involved in a series of break-ins in the same area.

Unfortunately, there isn't much legal action that can be done against porch pirates. Locating porch pirate rings are much more likely. When caught, the common charge issued is theft under \$5,000 and/or possession of property obtained by crime. The act of opening the box before stealing is mischief, and charges may be aggravated if the suspect trafficks stolen items, as opposed to keeping them for personal use. Mail theft can lead to more serious crimes like identity theft. The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre reports that mailbox thefts have cost Canadians \$43 million in fraud from the first three months of 2023.

Police stings may be used to catch suspected thieves, in which undercover police officers purchase stolen property and then arrest those involved. Evidence of



porch thieves can be collected from doorbell cameras and outdoor security cameras, with video footage or images being shared with the public on social media to identify the thief. In some cases, the stigma and public shame resulting from such a public outing is more damaging than the punishments imposed by the court. Police recommend giving camera proof to the police rather than posting clips online, because there could be a case for defamation.

How To Report Stolen Packages

If your package has been stolen, report the stolen package to the delivery company, the sender, and your local police.

1. Contact the Delivery Company

Reach out to the delivery company and confirm when it was delivered and where it was last seen. Drivers may use different techniques to deter porch pirates, so look around your property before lodging complaints. Most shipping companies have a process available to file a claim for refunds or replacements if the package is stolen or missing.

2. Contact the Sender

If the package is from a retailer, see if you can get a refund or replacement. They may require evidence of purchase and attempted delivery.

Retailers need to have a refund/replacement policy in place in the eventuality that a package is stolen. Using plain packaging to obscure contents will help to deter theft.

3. Contact Local Police

Report the theft to your local police. Submit any evidence that can be used to identify the thief or their tactics, as well as a description of stolen items. If you need to make an insurance claim, having a police report can be helpful documentation. If the value of the stolen package is under \$5,000, you may be able to report the theft online.

Even if the police aren't able to recover your package, gathering information about mail theft and package theft in the area can be helpful for ongoing investigations.

If you notice mail is missing, check your bank statements frequently and do a credit check to ensure sensitive information hasn't been breached.

Worried about identity fraud? Contact the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre at 1-888-495-8501.

Anyone with further information is urged to contact local police, or Crime Stoppers anonymously at

416-222-8477 (TIPS)