

## Stealing Postal Boxes – Have ID Thieves Found a New Trick?

July 14, 2011 – Question: Are identity thieves now stealing post office boxes? No, we’re not talking about the kind of PO Box that you would rent. We’re talking about the big, blue mailboxes that you drive up to at the post office to deposit your outgoing mail. Four of these two-hundred pound monstrosities have recently disappeared from Los Angeles area post offices, along with all of the mail they contained.

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
```

The FBI has now opened an investigation into the thefts; the latest of which took place in Glendale, CA. Unfortunately, this is a trend that could spread very easily. In fact, it may not have even originated in LA. A quick Google search turns up a number of similar crimes. And since the US Postal Service doesn’t have a web page dedicated to stolen mail boxes, the only way to find out if you are affected is to regularly ask if any of the boxes at your local post office have turned up missing.

The problem is not so much the stolen mailboxes as it is the letters they contain. People regularly send confidential information by mail. If you send anything to the IRS, it is almost certain to have your SSN on it. They also send checks, list credit card numbers, and provide a wealth of personal information. It’s enough to make most ID thieves drool simply by contemplating it.

Short of using FedEx or UPS for all of your mailing needs, there are some things that you can do to protect yourself from this kind of crime.

First, don’t deposit your mail in a postbox if the mail is going to sit there overnight. Virtually all mailboxes post the pick-up schedule used by the post office. If there isn’t another pick-up scheduled wait until the next day. And never put your mail in the mailbox on Sunday. The post office won’t pick it up until Monday.

Second, when you are mailing important paperwork or bills, get out of your car and walk the mail up to a box that is actually inside the post office. Two minutes of precaution can save you years of agony in trying to clean up your credit history.

Third, if you do find that items you have mailed never arrived at their destination – especially when you mail a number of items on the same day and none of them arrive – you definitely want to talk to your post office to see if they have had an issue. You should also consider taking a look at your credit report to make sure that there are no charges showing up that you are unaware of.

The bottom line here is that mail boxes in general appear to be an attractive target for ID thieves and it is up to you to see to it that you don’t become a victim.

byJim Malmberg

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