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BREAKING TOP STORY

Preventing porch piracy in the mid-Willamette Valley this holiday season

Maddie Pfeifer

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Amazon driver Austinn McDonald delivers packages in Corvallis Tuesday afternoon. Delivery drivers are extra busy during the holiday season which could lead to some of those deliveries being stolen.

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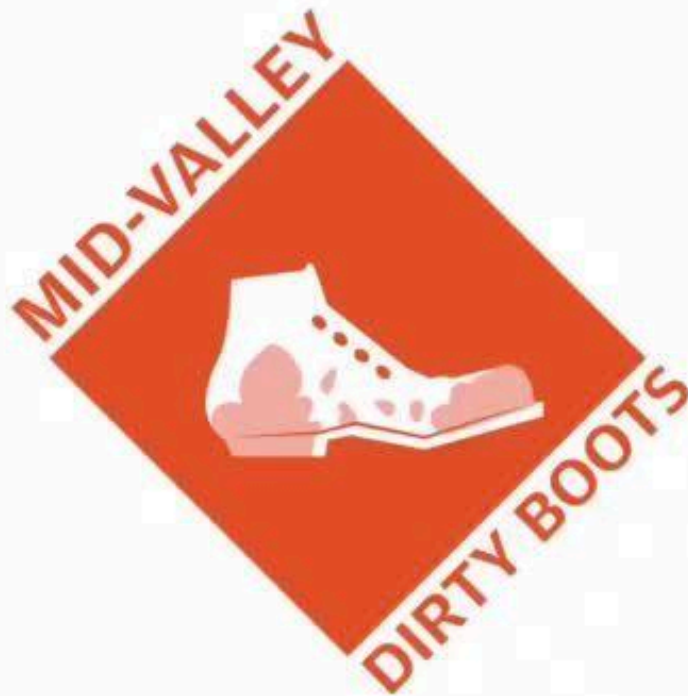
Each holiday season, packages are left on doorsteps, filled with gifts for loved ones — but those gifts don't always end up with the intended receiver.

Package theft is common any time of year, but some porch pirates use the holiday months to prey on the influx of packages delivered to homes.

“We do see an uptick in package theft around the holidays and in conjunction with COVID and an increase in online shopping,” Corvallis police Lt. Ryan Eaton said.

Albany, on the other hand, doesn’t see a clear increase in parcel theft during the holiday season. According to APD Community Engagement Officer Laura Hawkins, the statistics don’t support that trend.

On the other hand, Hawkins said, that could be because people simply aren’t reporting it.



According to a **survey** of 1,000 Americans from security company SafeWise, about 210 million packages were stolen from porches across the country throughout the last 12 months.

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Based on the survey, 39% of respondents said they had packages delivered several times a week and 72% of Americans said the pandemic has made them more concerned about parcel theft.

The survey results indicate packages from Amazon, FedEx and the U.S. Postal Service are the ones thieves steal the most.

Adam Sale said although parcel theft is relatively low in the grand scheme of things, it's still a problem that can affect anyone. Sale is a postal inspector and team leader for the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

"Every theft is significant because it can impact our customers," Sale said.

For the thieves, stealing a package off a porch is a seemingly low-risk crime, and they can get away with it in many cases, he added.

"It's such an easy crime of opportunity," Hawkins said.

Reports of parcel theft

Looking at a local law enforcement agency's call log is one way to see that package theft really is impacting a community.

There are multiple reports of stolen packages in the **CPD daily activity log**:

- Nov. 17 – Officers were dispatched to the 1600 block of Northwest 23rd Street for the report of a package theft. Officers discovered an unknown suspect stole multiple packages from the front porch of the residence.
- Nov. 21 – Officer responded to the 3600 block of Southeast Shoreline Drive for a theft. Female reported a package containing various items was stolen from her front porch. There was no suspect information.

- Nov. 26 – An officer was dispatched to the 1400 block of Northwest Highland Avenue for a package theft that occurred earlier in the day. The suspect was caught on camera stealing the package but was unable to be identified.
- Dec. 8 – Officers were dispatched to the 1100 block of Northwest Beca Avenue for the report of a package theft. Officers discovered two unknown males stole packages from the front porch of the residence and fled the scene.

These police reports highlight one important aspect of package theft: It's hard to find the culprit. Identifying suspects of such a quick crime can be difficult — even when utilizing a camera pointed at the porch.

“Video surveillance is good, but it doesn't seem to be a deterrent,” Hawkins said.

Irreplaceable gifts

Back in November, Rachel Kohler's mom crafted some handmade cat toys, slippers, a tote bag and even a denim quilt as Christmas gifts. She sent them to Kohler via USPS. But Kohler, who lives in Corvallis, never got them.

While Kohler didn't witness the thieves, she looked up the tracking information for the large packages and also contacted USPS. The packages were said to be delivered.

“I was very upset about it, and obviously my mom was upset about it too,” Kohler said.

Because the gifts were so personal, Kohler said her mom just hopes whoever ended up with them didn't throw them away.

Now, Kohler has set up text notifications for all of her packages to try to avoid a similar situation.

She's not the only one.

Take a look at a local Facebook group, and chances are someone is alerting the community to be on the lookout for their stolen package. Kohler initially posted about the gifts her mom made in a Corvallis Facebook group. Some even post surveillance footage of the thieves.

To catch a thief

The Corvallis Police Department is employing a few different tactics this holiday season to catch some of these porch pirates. Eaton said CPD will be using crime analysis to see where packages are most often being stolen. Then, the department will increase patrols in those areas.

The agency is also going to use “bait packages” to catch thieves in the act. Fake parcels will be left on the porches of participating residents. Officers will be waiting to see if anyone decides to try their luck and steal the package.

Anyone interested in participating in the bait packages operation should contact CPD Officer Ryan Bell.

USPIS will be utilizing the same sort of tactic and will coordinate with local law enforcement agencies.

“We do a lot of these during peak season, which is from Thanksgiving to Christmas,” Sale said. “It strengthens our relationship between inspection and local law enforcement.”

Combating the problem

Fortunately, there are steps to take to prevent package theft or deter a potential thief.

“The most important thing you can do is collect your mail, collect your parcel every night,” Sale said.

He advised people to identify a secure location in which a carrier can place the parcel.

Some other local law enforcement agency and USPIS recommendations include:

- Track deliveries online.
- Do curbside pickup.
- Have packages delivered to your place of employment if your employer allows it.
- Get a box at your nearest post office.
- Have a well-lit area in front of your house for deliveries.
- Get a lock box for parcels.
- Use video camera surveillance to monitor your porch.
- Ask a trusted neighbor to get your package as soon as it's delivered.

When a package is stolen, residents can contact their local law enforcement agency to report the crime.

Hawkins encourages everyone to report parcel theft more. She empathized with the frustration of having items stolen.

“It’s disheartening, and it’s frustrating for us too,” she said.

If a stolen item was a USPS parcel, the thief can be charged with a Class C felony for mail theft. If the package is from a private company, such as Amazon or FedEx, the thief can be charged with theft. The seriousness of the charge will be determined by the monetary value of the stolen goods.

If the stolen package is from the USPS, customers may call USPIS at 1-877-876-2455 to report it.

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