

Office Creepers

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this circular is to reduce the incidence of **theft** in the workplace, and to decrease workplace office **burglaries**, committed by individuals commonly referred to as the "Office Creeper." The "Office Creeper" is an individual who enters an office building, disguised as a fellow office worker or a stranger posing as a repair, delivery, cleaning or other service personnel. The "Office Creeper" could be male or female dressed in a suit and tie or in the attire that is appropriate for that work environment. This circular contains valuable **theft** prevention tips that can help you avoid becoming a victim of crime. The Winooski Police Department believes you can reduce the risk of crime, at the work place, by applying these simple precautions.

SUSPICIOUS PERSONS/BEHAVIORS

If you see someone wandering, or appearing to be lost, in your building, ask if you can help them by asking simple questions such as, "May I help you?" or "Who are you here to see?" If the person has legitimate business in the building, he or she will appreciate your assistance. Escort them to the correct office, or to the "house phone" to call their intended contact. If not, ask the person to leave the building, but only if you

feel comfortable doing so. If the person refuses to leave, call the police or building security. Be prepared to describe the person when you call the police. Learn your organization's safety guidelines and policies. Review them often.

The following are examples of behaviors that could be considered suspicious:

- An unfamiliar person going from room to room or office to office;
- A person standing in a hallway for a long period of time;
- A person waiting outside of the building near the time that the building will be opening or closing; and
- Watch out for the "Head Popper." A "Head Popper" is an opportunistic thief or burglar who peers his/her head quickly into a room or opens a wrong door, pretending to look for a specific office or person. Their intention is to deprive the rightful owner of property (i.e., credit cards, money, car keys, laptop computer, etc.).

OFFICE WATCH PROGRAM

You and your co-workers may want to establish an Office Watch Program for your building. This can be set up by office, section, or floor to help alert each other of unauthorized visitors or potential criminal activities. This program can follow the same guidelines as introduced in the Neighborhood Watch Program.

TIPS TO HELP STOP THEFTS

Preventing theft is every employee's responsibility. Having the "It's not my problem" attitude is not realistic or practical. Everyone must work together, to become the eyes and ears that will help keep the work place crime free.

Use keys, electronic access card and codes properly.

- Never share them with anyone;
- Report lost keys;
- Do not place personal identification on key rings;
- Keep personal keys and office keys on separate key rings;
- Never leave office keys, to locked cabinets or closets, in unlocked drawers or on open hooks;
- If you discover your keys missing, call your office security representative. Consider having locks rekeyed and new keys issued if they do not turn up;
- Keep a chronological key roster of the keys that are currently assigned to employees; and
- When an employee's assignment changes, have a mechanism in place that will require them to return all keys or security items that provide access to your office or business.

When individuals leave their office(s), most "hide" their purses under their desks or in

unlocked file drawers. Many men believe that leaving their wallets in their jacket pockets or briefcases is safe. That is the first place an "office creeper" looks and those few seconds can cause you grief.

- Keep your purse or wallet with you or locked in a secure drawer or cabinet. Position coat racks away from entrances or exits to minimize temptation.

Leaving the office unlocked and allowing the telephones to ring is an invitation for the "Office Creeper" to enter.

- Lock the office or have someone sit in for you;
- Have calls forwarded to other offices or activate voice mail;
- Secure laptop computers with a security cable locking device; and
- Secure all valuables, money, credit cards, personal checkbooks, and travel documents in a locked-file cabinet or drawer.

Exercise caution when a repairperson shows up to work on, replace or remove office equipment.

- Make it a habit to visually inspect identification badges. The uniform is not always enough;
- Never leave a repair person alone, even if it is someone you know;

- Call the repair company or ask to see the work order for the location, and who approved the service call;
- Verify written orders for property to be removed from location; and
- Never allow repairs to security or communication equipment without verifying a written order from the appropriate supervising office.

Keep track of office equipment and furniture.

- Legibly mark all office equipment with identifying numbers or tags. Markings can be made using paint, non-removable decals or engraving pens;
- Keep an up to date written inventory of your office equipment;
- Perform regular inventories on equipment; and
- Invest in a lock box for office keys.

Keep information secure. Competition within the business world is on the rise, with large corporate takeovers and consolidations. With the help of high-speed computer systems and the World Wide Web, business espionage is at the forefront.

- Memorize the combinations and passwords for computers and safes;
- Never share your password(s);
- 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;

- Make sure confidential files are secure at all times;
- Secure floppy disks and compact discs in locked cabinets; and
- Never load "outside" software unless you have permission and when you do, be sure the program is checked for viruses.

CONCLUSION

If confronted by a thief, follow your organization's guidelines. Remember, it is usually best to give a thief what he or she wants. Don't try to be a hero. Get a good description of the suspect, such as age, height, weight, eye and hair color. Look for distinguishing personal characteristics, such as scars, tattoos, and hairstyle. Observe the suspect's jewelry clothing colors and style. Call the Winooski Department immediately, to report the crime, in addition to your organization's security personnel.

Notifying neighboring offices of the incident is a good neighbor policy. This will alert them to be on the lookout. The costs (i.e., time to replace stolen items, disruption of work, and the personal stress) associated with the violation of one's security, is immeasurable. Everyone must work together to become the eyes and ears that will help keep the work environment crime free.