

Theft and Vandalism Response for Registrars and Collections Specialists

Introduction

This document outlines the necessary steps for theft and vandalism response within a cultural organization. It is designed to be used and adapted for all cultural property institutions (museums, libraries, archives, heritage sites, etc.) of any size. The recommendations stated here are not intended to be exhaustive, but emphasise the role of the Collections Specialist/Registrar while providing a general sense of the processes necessary considerations.

As with natural hazards and human-caused disasters, response to theft and vandalism requires collaboration within and without your organization. This document is intended to compliment your organization's emergency response plan while identifying the incident-specific steps that should be performed in the event of theft and/or vandalism. The checklist can serve as a jumping off point to determine staff roles in the wake of theft or vandalism: Who contacts law enforcement?; Who contacts board members or lenders?

This information was compiled by the Association of Registrars and Collections Specialist (ARCS) Emergency Sub-Committee to act as a resource for those seeking to improve, update, or develop a theft and vandalism response procedure.

The Sub-Committee encourages all institutions to develop a theft and vandalism response procedure. Although unpleasant to consider, all institutions are vulnerable to theft and/or vandalism in one capacity or another. Should your organization find itself in need to respond to a theft in progress, or find that one has already occurred, the development of a theft and vandalism response procedure can aid in the return of a stolen object and minimise injury and/or damages.

As with all emergency planning and preparedness, theft and vandalism response procedures and related documentation should be updated in the organization's Emergency Plans on an annual basis as a minimum.

Checklist: Initial Response to Collections Theft and/or Vandalism

IF THE THEFT/ACT OF VANDALISM IS IN PROGRESS:

- Safeguard people: obtain necessary medical help; secure the scene; ask potential witnesses to remain and/or provide contact information; and
- Notify local law enforcement.

FOLLOWING THE THEFT/ACT OF VANDALISM:

- Safeguard against additional loss or damage to people or collections;
- Call together staff to oversee each response team function;
- In collaboration with Security/Facility Operations, document all activities and timeline during the incident response in writing, photographs and videos;
- If the theft occurred in the past, notify local law enforcement;
- Notify insurance broker and carriers;
- Notify board members, donors and/or lenders, as appropriate;
- Conduct internal investigation including reviewing key check outs and swipe access, security camera footage, etc.
- Cooperate with local law enforcement on their investigation;
- Enlist the aid of the media in recovering the object by providing information and regular updates;
- Contact conservator for treatment in the event of vandalism;
- Communicate with staff, as appropriate;
- Gather relevant records on missing objects; and
- Notify dealers, electronic databases of stolen art and collections materials, museums and libraries with similar collections, metal recycling centers, etc. (Your institution may want to compile these contacts in advance.)

Record the contact information for your contacts:

Local Law Enforcement: Contact name _____	Phone _____
Insurance Broker: Contact name _____	Phone _____
Chairman of the Board: Name _____	Phone _____
Legal counsel: Contact name _____	Phone _____
Donor: Contact name _____	Phone _____
Lender: Contact name _____	Phone _____
Conservator: Name _____	Phone _____

Checklist: Object ID

This checklist will aid you in providing the information required to identify an object as yours.

Take photographs

- Include overall views: front, back and sides;
- Close-ups of inscriptions, markings, damage or repairs; and
- Include a scale in the image.

Answer these questions:

- Is this object an incoming loan? YES / NO
- If yes, what is the lender information?

- What type of object is it? _____
- What is the object made of? _____
- How was it made? (i.e. carved, cast, etched) _____
- What are the dimensions? _____
- Are there any identifying features or characteristics that could help identify it? (i.e. maker's mark, previous repairs)

- Does the object have a title? _____
- What is the subject (i.e. landscape, Virgin Mary and Child) _____
- When was the object made? _____
- Who made the object? _____
- Provide a brief description of the object, including information that might help identify the object:

- Where was the object made? _____

Remember: Keep collections documentation in a secure place