



police, the press, and the highest levels of the museum management (and Board), for which they will be held responsible.

The reaction to a possible theft differs with the conditions. If the museum is open to the public and the theft appears to be from a display case or off the wall, a different response is justified than if the theft appears to have been from a locked storage room. In the former case, if an object is simply "missing" and the case is still locked and intact, the response might be different than if the case glass was smashed. Let's assume the suspected theft was discovered from a gallery location during public hours.

Many museums have "alert levels" for their guards. "Alert level 3" is the standard alert level that exists all of the time in a museum. Normal parcel searches take place and visitors are treated as they would be on a "normal" day. "Alert level 2" is reserved for special occasions. Public buildings are often notified by police that, while they have not been targeted specifically for a crime or threat, the possibility exists. The day after the U.S. bombed Libya many public buildings were put on alert due to rumors of possible terrorist attacks on public buildings. Museums usually define a specific upgraded level of search for incoming and outgoing parcels at "alert level 2." "Alert level 2" can also be used if a museum suspects that a theft has occurred but isn't quite sure. While staff responds to conservation or photography labs to verify that the object is indeed safe and in their care, security increases the outgoing parcel search "just in case." In

such instances, "alert level 2" is brief and will either be upgraded to "alert level 1" or downgraded to normal operations.

"Alert level 1" is the highest alert. It occurs when a museum feels with some certainty that a theft has occurred. The museum pre-defines, with the advice of its attorney, the level of search it wants to implement in such situations. Some museums close the doors and ask visitors if they would mind remaining a few moments until security is able to regain control of the situation by doubling staff on doors, etc. But great care must be taken in such cases because any visitor wishing to leave must be accommodated. While most visitors will cooperate, some will not. Look closely at these individuals, but tread lightly. "Alert level 1" is generally characterized by an extremely thorough search of outgoing parcels (consistent, of course, with the circumstances). One searches briefcases closely for small objects and concentrates on other tactics for large missing objects. "Alert level 1" might include doubling manpower at the door or even stationing museum management at public entrances to "call the shots," in the event a major decision has to be made quickly regarding the need to detain a visitor. During "alert level 1," the museum closes to incoming visitors and all activity on docks stops. Within the building, all normal activity stops, and the full resources of the museum are devoted to resolving the question of whether a theft has occurred and if so, whether the missing object is still in the building waiting to be removed.



Whenever a theft is suspected, implement an action plan unique to your facility. Dispatch trained individuals to check the various places to where an object might have been removed, i.e., storage, the registrar's office, packing and shipping, conservation, photography, etc. This will require the preplanned assistance of staff from various departments, all trained in what they are to do when they hear the words, "Alert Level 1-- the Picasso is missing." Simultaneously, raise your alert level in the gallery and make sure that entrances and docks are notified. If necessary, close the museum to incoming visitors and clear the affected area. Remember that visitors may be trampling evidence. Keep EVERYONE including the curator away from the crime scene.

It is essential to the success of your plan that a decision be made in advance regarding who may implement an "alert level 1" condition. Operationally, the security manager is the one most logically authorized to do so. Staff must understand that they will have to cooperate fully and ask questions later when such an alert level is implemented. In the past, museums lost valuable time and possibly even objects while curators, conservators, registrars, administrators, and security directors bickered over who could deploy whose employees during emergency situations.

Treat the increased alert level as "routine." Avoid giving the appearance that the museum doesn't know what it is doing. On the contrary, give the

impression that the museum is a dynamic, living institution with many employees carrying out many complex duties and that, although there are procedures to control movement of objects, sometimes security people are just "too good" at doing their job. They sometimes discover "missing" objects in the moments between their removal from display and the notification of the clearinghouse. This way, if the suspected theft is reported to the press by a tipster, you will look like security is "too good" rather than "confused," when the "theft" is discovered to be unfounded. There is indeed a reason to be embarrassed if you have no procedures in effect and the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. There is no need for embarrassment if the "theft" turns out to be a false alarm, but your thorough, professional, well-trained staff were just doing their jobs during a momentary lapse of procedure. In the first situation, your system didn't work. In the second, it worked quite well. Many museums lose valuable time by not reporting a theft for fear of looking silly if the object was removed by an employee who forgot to tell anyone else.

Since the response to various possible scenarios will differ for each institution, I can't tell you what to do in each case. But the scenarios will almost always be predictable: theft from public space during public hours, theft from public space during non-public hours, theft from non-public space where only staff has access, etc. You can define a plan of action for each scenario and for each time of day situation.



Above all, make your staff aware that you WILL take decisive action. If an object is discovered missing at 3:00 am, the director, registrar, and curator will be notified. If it means that these people must come to the museum at that hour, so be it. Of course, security should be ready to explain why the missing object was not discovered at 5:00 P.M., if there is no evidence of break-in or if the object is later discovered to have been moved prior to that time by staff, but that's another issue. If everyone does his or her job, this won't happen. Certainly, those responsible for removing collection objects must understand that if they do so without making proper notifications, the security staff will assume the worst, and they will not be criticized for "overreacting."

When it is verified that an object cannot be accounted for, the police should be called. Avoid calling police over the emergency or "911" phone number unless a real emergency exists. The dispatcher will dispatch the officer to you over the radio and the radio is monitored by the press. Call your local precinct and ask to speak to the Watch Commander or his alternate. Explain that you have discovered a theft and that you would like for a police official and investigator to come over to discuss it. Explain the value and importance of such thefts, the fact that they often lead to extortions, and the fact that museums have been advised to avoid public disclosure of the theft for an hour or so after discovery in order to give the police and FBI a chance to get mobilized.

Don't assume that the police will understand all of this unless you explain it to them. Art thefts are few and far between for the average cop. Ask him to dispatch assistance to you in such a manner as to avoid alerting press or others who are monitoring police radios. Hopefully he will do so and help will arrive before the press does. It is best if you pre-arrange such a procedure in advance and ask police to train their station clerks so they know what to expect. When the plan works right, the commander receives a radio call simply telling him to "see Mr. Smith at the City Art Museum in regard to a special event." The commander will understand the urgency but the press will ignore it. On the other hand, even the most minor message over the radio often makes the press suspicious. In eight years as Director of Security for Chicago's Art Institute, I know of numerous instances where the press called us in response to police being dispatched for a "larceny" when it was simply a stolen purse or something minor. It was tough convincing them that no major art theft had occurred.

I do not advocate hiding anything from the press. But I feel that the investigation can be hindered by them. The press will create a climate that is not conducive to negotiating the return of the object, and press coverage may result in a number of false extortion calls. Callers may claim to have your object and offer to return it for a fee. Of course, when you drop the money in the proverbial phone booth, you never see the return of



your object. So avoid press coverage for a few hours, if possible. And I truly mean only a few hours. Don't seek to avoid the press, only "manage" it a bit.

After making the police report, provide them with photos of the missing object. Both color and black and white photos are necessary. When possible, show both the front and back of paintings and objects. Obtain copies of the black and white photos from your file so they can be distributed. Try to identify some flaw or mark or unique quality of the missing object that can be used to identify it. Don't release this information to anyone unless it is absolutely necessary to do so-- not even to the police. In fact, release to the press some minor detail that is false. If the paintings have numbers penciled on the back, say 456490, tell the press that the number is 456555. This way, the false extortion callers will tell you the incorrect number, and you will know if and when you are dealing with the real criminal. Only the real thief will know that the numbers released to the press are wrong. Don't even release this "secret" information to police. Police reports are public information.

Eventually, after a few hours, you will have to report the incident to the press. They will find out and if they are not notified, you will be criticized. Have a press release prepared in advance ready to "fill in the blanks." Designate ONE individual to deal with the press and make no exceptions. Instruct all employees of this policy. Advise them that we do not intend to deny the press any information, only to make

sure that the information that is released is accurate and does not interfere with the one primary goal of the investigation-- the safe recovery of the irreplaceable object. Advise them that it is not uncommon for the press to follow employees home from work, strike up a conversation on the bus, and try to gather as much information as possible for the next edition. While we should support freedom of the press, the interests of the museum come first. Loose lips, as they said in the war, sink ships.

Don't assume the police will know or appreciate the value or importance of the work of art. They are not art scholars and are notoriously hard to convince that anyone would want to steal something as ugly as a Picasso! Urge them to call in the FBI promptly. They will not do this if you don't urge them to do so. In nearly every case I have been aware of, local police and FBI jealously protected their own turf. If the object is valued at more than \$5,000, the FBI may legally get involved. This is based on the theory that the object will cross state lines.

Begin a thorough search of your building and grounds to make sure the object is not still on-site waiting to be removed by the thief. This includes a locker search. Know in advance what you will do in this regard. There is no time to sit and bicker with the director of personnel about union rules or other employee relations matters in regard to employee searches, interrogation of suspects, polygraph tests, etc. A statement asking employee cooperation should be



prewritten and ready to be issued after minor updating.

Freeze all movement of mail and other packages out of the building. Order all records pertaining to the movement of any materials in or out of the building to be seized or frozen until they are no longer needed. UPS and similar logs will be critical. Assemble all alarm logs, visitor logs, etc. that may be pertinent to assure they don't disappear. Who knows if the mailroom attendant or guard dispatcher is involved? YOU control and protect this possible evidence. Stop all contractor activity and search all tool containers and other possible hiding places under their control.

Every museum should have a mailing list ready to be printed on the computer or ready on labels so they can notify the law enforcement and art world of a theft. But who do you call? Don't the names and addresses change frequently? Yes, they do. Contact Steve Keller and Associates, Inc. We will make available to you for a nominal price an IBM or Macintosh diskette containing up-to-date lists of everyone in the U.S. art community to be contacted initially. But don't wait for the theft. Have this diskette on hand and have it updated annually. The list includes FBI offices, Customs, Interpol, art dealer associations, commercial galleries, etc. It is an inexpensive precaution every museum should take. But since there are other more detailed lists pertinent to specific objects or types of art, notify us immediately for a custom list of people to whom flyers should be sent in the event of a theft.

During the investigation, monitor the activity of the police. Verify that they are notifying those who should be notified and are taking the theft seriously. Bring your security consultant into the investigation at the very earliest time so he or she can monitor and coordinate the police inquiry. The security manager has done this before. Few police or museum officials have ever done it at all. If you discover the theft during the night, don't feel you have to wait until morning to call! Time is of the essence!