

# Property Identification

## What's Operation Identification?

Operation Identification is a program sponsored by the Janesville Police Department in which residents are allowed to borrow property engravers for use in their own homes. The engravers are used to put personal identification on valuable property to make it less attractive to a burglar or thief and also easier to track in case of a crime.

## Why Is Engraved Property Less Likely To Be Stolen?

Most of the criminals who operate in the Janesville area are amateurs. They're mainly interested in stealing property that's hard to identify and easy to sell to someone else. They run a much greater risk of being arrested and convicted if they're caught with stolen property marked with identification that proves it belongs to someone else. Because of that extra risk, it's also harder to re-sell marked property. So, the thief usually won't even bother to steal it in the first place.

## How Does The Program Work?

Property engravers are available in the lobby of the Police Department. Engravers can be borrowed any time during the day, and they are loaned out free of charge. All you have to do is provide your name, current address and phone number, and agree to return the engraver within five days so it can be available for someone else's use.

## Is The Engraver Hard To Use?

The engravers are about the size of a pear, and shaped so they fit in your hand. They feature a hard carbide tip that vibrates 7,200 times a minute. This vibration is what etches your identification on almost any kind of material: plastic, wood, metal, even glass. There is also an adjustment you can use to vary the amount of vibration. With a little practice, using the engraver is about as easy using a paint brush.

## What Kind Of Identification Should I Use?

We recommend that you use your Wisconsin driver's license number. That's the long number printed at the top of your driver's license.

This number is computer coded according your name and date of birth, and no one else has one exactly like it. A computer terminal located in the Janesville Police Department can be used to check this number with the Department of Transportation computer in Madison. So, by using that driver's license number, the owner of recovered stolen property can be identified in a matter of seconds. And since all the police departments in Wisconsin have the same kind of computer terminal, your property can be identified and returned to you from anywhere in Wisconsin.

It's also a good idea to engrave "WI" at the end of your driver's license number to show it's from Wisconsin. That's because nearly every police department in the United States also has a computer like ours, so your property can be identified and returned to you even if it's recovered in another state.

### *What If I Don't Have A Drivers License?*

Then you can get an ID card from the Department of Motor Vehicles that has the same kind of computer number on it. You can engrave this ID number on your property instead of a driver's license number.

Naturally, this ID card alone does not allow you to drive a car. But it does come in handy for Operation Identification, when you have to cash a check, and any other time you might need some form of identification.

### *Why Can't I Use My Social Security Number?*

Unlike your driver's license, a Social Security number is kept strictly confidential by the federal government. Even a police department has a hard time finding out who a Social Security number belongs to. That's why we recommend using your driver's license number instead. And besides, if someone has your social security number, you run the risk of becoming a victim of identity theft.

### **What Should I Engrave?**

Thieves mainly like to steal property that's valuable and also small enough to carry away easily. Some of the most frequently stolen items in Janesville include:

- **Cameras**
- **Binoculars**
- **I-Pods, I-Pads, etc.**
- **Flat Screen TVs**
- **DVD Players**
- **Cell Phones**
- **Chain Saws**
- **Lawn Mowers**
- **Power Tools**
- **Laptops**
- **Cash**

### *Don't These Items Already Have Serial Numbers on Them?*

Yes, and we also encourage you to record these serial numbers as another way to help identify your property if it's stolen. When you borrow an engraver from the Police Department, you'll be given an Operation Identification booklet that serves as a good place to record serial numbers and other information to help identify your property.

Unfortunately, too often those serial numbers are easy for a thief to remove because they're stamped on flimsy metal tags or adhesive strips. That's why identification engraved right into the surface of each item is still your best bet.

Of course, you probably also own quite a few valuable items that don't have any serial numbers at all. These may include golf clubs, fishing equipment, stereo speakers, luggage, lawn furniture and jewelry, to name just a few examples.

### *Are There Some Things I Shouldn't Engrave?*

Yes. The engraver's vibrating tip may damage fragile pieces of glassware and ceramic figurines. Also, you may not want to alter the appearance of your silverware and antiques by engraving them. And obviously, valuables such as jewelry and rare coins are too small to engrave easily.

Instead, you should photograph such items and then put the photos in a safe deposit box so you can identify them later if they are lost in a burglary or fire.

## **What Should I Do After I've Used the Engraver?**

Once you've engraved your property, you can use window decals provided by the Police Department to identify your residence as a participant in Operation Identification. These decals, displayed on your back door, windows or garage, tell the would-be burglar or thief that your property is marked with personal identification. Chances are he'll go somewhere else instead.

## **Is There Anything Else I Can Do To Protect My Property?**

Your police department has dozens of ideas about protecting your home, your property and your family against crime. Call the Janesville Police Department at (608)755-3133 to learn more about how you can help to prevent crime in your neighborhood and your community.