

Operation Identification

Instructions for Completion of Operation Identification Record Form

General Information

When personal property of any nature is stolen or otherwise becomes the target of a criminal investigation, officers must have a way to positively identify that property. They must have a unique set of identifying numbers, letters or similar markings to be able to enter the property into the nationwide database or to search for that property within that database. There are only two things that make a piece of property unique, to the point of being able to accomplish the above objectives.

One of those items is the *serial number* that is assigned to the property by the manufacturer. This number is *not* to be confused with the *model number*. The model number is common to all production runs of the exact same item. The serial number is only assigned to a single item of each one of those products. Think of it like an automobile. The model of a vehicle would be something like a Chevrolet Malibu. There are thousands of Chevrolet Malibu's (models) manufactured every year. But each one is assigned a unique vehicle identification number (VIN) that separates that particular Malibu from all the others (serial number). The model number is helpful but the serial number is essential. Of course, the presence of this number on any item is useless if the owner has not properly recorded the number somewhere that is easily retrievable when needed.

The only other number that can make an item unique, and thus identifiable to police, is what is called an Owner Applied Number, sometimes referred to as an OAN. This number and its proper method of marking and makeup will be described later in these instructions. When an item contains both the serial number AND the OAN, it makes it very difficult for a thief to peddle the merchandise and it makes it much easier for an officer to locate it and return it to the rightful owner. The need to record this number is less important, since presumably the owner will have used the same number to mark all his or her belongings and should know the number off-hand and be able to furnish it to an officer.

Operation Identification (ID) History and Purpose

Operation ID was started in the early 1960's on the west coast, in an effort to stem the increasing tide of property thefts and related crimes. They were finding that criminals were effectively removing the serial numbers of property making it virtually impossible to locate the true owner, or even to determine for certain if the property was actually stolen. The concept of engraving a number that was unique only to the true owner was conceived. The recommendation was that this number was to be etched or otherwise somewhat permanently marked into the property itself. This added one more level of protection to the owner and forced the criminals to deal with one more barrier to elude detection. Pawn shops were alerted to the program and we trained to look for this number and further, if one was located, to contact local law enforcement to ascertain if the property was reported stolen. The program proved to be successful and within a short period of time, law enforcement agencies across the country began to replicate the program and implement it in their jurisdictions.

Owner Applied Number (OAN) selection

Individuals

Far and away, the best number to use for this purpose is your State Driver's License or State Identification Card number. NEVER USE YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER. Not only is property much more difficult to trace with a social security number, it also opens you up to the possibility of identity theft. Law enforcement data bases are uniquely suited for locating anything related to a driver's license number. To be certain it is immediately recognized by law enforcement as a driver's license number, the proper way to do it is to precede the number with the abbreviation of the state that issues the license so for Texas it would be TX. Follow the number with the abbreviation DL, for driver's license. All drivers' licenses in Texas are an eight (8) digit number, so an example of how it would actually look is as follows:

TX12345678DL

Marking the property this way identifies the license number as being issued in Texas and indicates further that it is a driver's license. If the number is a State issued Identification Number and not a driver's license, use the same method substituting the initials "DL" with "ID". An example is:

TX87654321ID

Business or commercial owners

The best number for marking property owned by organizations and not individuals is by using the State Sales and Use Tax number issued by the Comptroller of Public Accounts, if the business is a Texas based business. The proper name of the number and issuing authority may be called something different in other states, but all businesses should have some type of identifying number issued by a State taxing authority. The proper method for marking items using this number is to precede the number with the word TAX. The number should then be followed by the abbreviation NO, for number, or the symbol # for number. An example would be:

TAX12345-678-9# or TAX98765-432-1 NO

Location of Markings

Most people do not like to engrave or otherwise permanently mark property on the face or surface they themselves look at daily. They prefer to place it out of sight and this is fine, so long as it is in a location that will be readily visible to an officer when the side on which it is marked is viewed. There are some guidelines and preferred locations for some items.

Large objects

Larger items, such as electronics (TV's, DVD players, microwaves,, etc.) are best marked on the very back, in the top right hand corner. Items such as yard blowers, hedge trimmers, lawn edgers, and similar items are generally best marked on the bottom of their cases or motor housings. Lawnmowers or other rolling equipment of that nature (except bicycles) should be marked on the rear exterior of the mower deck (if a push mower) or the frame near the motor mount (if a riding piece of equipment). Bicycles are best marked somewhere on the underside of

the sprocket where the pedals meet the frame, but be cautious. Many manufacturers's also use that same location to place their serial numbers. Don't write over or cover it up. Items such as furniture are best marked on the bottom right front (as viewed when the furniture is in its normally used position.)

The preceding suggestions are merely guidelines. Generally, think "back top right" or "bottom front right" for most locations. The best rule of thumb was stated earlier. Place it in a location that will be viewed by an officer when they are examining the item for details.

Small or unique objects

It may be that an item is too small (i.e. wedding ring) to mark them as suggested above. It may also be that defacing the object would decrease its value (i.e. – an antique coin). When it is not possible or desired to mark the item as suggested above, exceptions must be made. Any marking that makes the item uniquely identifiable helps, such as your full initials, a date, or any other specific marking you will remember or record. In the absence of special markings, pictures and/or videos generally prove very helpful.

Photographing Your Valuables

Every object that is photographed needs to have a point of reference that is readily identifiable to everyone. A ruler is the most common thing to use. This quickly and easily "sizes" the valuable. If you use a ruler make sure the markings are easily readable in a photograph and that it provides good readability of the numbers and markings. For objects less than one foot, use a ruler that is no longer than 12 inches. If the item is longer, (i.e.- a rifle) use a yardstick that has the same properties described for the ruler. If the item exceeds 36 inches, the yardstick is still the best but take more photos. Take one that shows the entire object in relation to the yard stick, and then take one closer up that shows only the portion of the item covered by the yardstick but still makes it possible to determine the objects overall size with regard to the measurement.

Be sure to place the valuable on a good contrasting background free of clutter and distractions. You do not want to have your valuable vanish into the background. A solid color background free of any designs or shading is best. The background color must contrast with the valuable. Use a dark background for lighter colored valuables and a light background for darker ones. Generally, a bed sheet works well. Be sure it does not cast shadows onto or around the valuable. Practice taking several pictures from different angles, with and without a flash and keep several of the best results. Color photos are generally preferable over black and white photos.

To verify that the valuable you are photographing is yours, get a small 3 X 5 index card or something of similar size and color. On it, write your driver's license, State ID, or business tax number in the same format given previously. In addition, write the date the picture was taken on the card or paper. Lay the card below the ruler so that the picture contains a view of the valuable, the ruler and the card with the ID number. This is pretty solid proof that the item belongs to you.

More photos are generally better than less. You never know when the small detail that shows up in one photograph but not another is the one clue that proves your ownership. It is good to have multiple copies of the photos. One set should be filed in your home or office where they are readily available to you should you need them. Another set should be kept off site, such as with

a trusted relative or in a safe deposit box. This set can be retrieved in the event the set at home is lost or destroyed.

The added benefits of photos are when disasters happen, such as fires or floods. While not criminal acts requiring the photos, the proof of ownership and added dimension that photos give are invaluable for use in insurance claims. This is yet another reason why you would want to maintain at least one complete copy off site.

Videotaping Valuables

Videotaping of larger items contained within their setting (i.e. –the home theatre system in place in the media room) is invaluable. Not only does it demonstrate absolute ownership, you can talk along with it to provide added details. If you plan to narrate your video, write a script before you start. Have someone walk beside you who can see the video screen and together film and narrate what is being recorded. At the beginning of the film, and again at the end, state your full name, give the identifying number you are using (even take the driver's license out and photograph it) and state the date of the video. Having a newspaper that shows the front page and date are helpful to prove that the video was taped at the time you state.

Follow the same guidelines listed above for still photographs. That is, use a ruler or other universal form of sizing identification and prepare several of the 3 X 5 cards with the proper numbers and date placed frequently around the room and beside various objects. When you pan from one item to the next, you should be able to pick up one card as the previous one disappears from view. Remember to make duplicates of the video and keep one off-site in the event that the one in the home is compromised. It also allows you to keep one set and give the exact duplicate to the insurance company or law enforcement.

Videotaping is particularly useful for items that can't or won't be marked. Remember those rare stamp collections? Videotaping allows you to continually turn the pages of the binder that holds them while continually recording. Again, using a second person to narrate and turn pages helps the quality of the video. For items like rare coins, be sure to turn the coin over on the video so the viewer sees both sides of the coin and knows it is opposite sides of the same coin.

Use a media format and recording device that can be easily duplicated and that takes quality pictures. Avoid the use of things like cell phone cameras, unless they have an unusually high resolution and can easily be transferred to a device that law enforcement or others can take, view and copy.

What Items Should be Included in Pictures, Videos and Lists

Many items are obvious. Television sets, any electronic equipment, jewelry, weapons, expensive power tools, etc. are all examples of items you would most likely want to record. The list is potentially endless and attempting to list every item here would be impractical. Replacement cost is generally a good indicator. If it will be costly to lose or replace, record it. Many times however, this may not be the sole determining factor. Consider items that have intrinsic value (valuable paintings, etc.) as well as items that may have significance only to you. If it is important to you and would incur a financial or emotional loss to you if it were stolen or destroyed, record it.

Instructions for Completion of Record Form

Item	Manufacturer's Model Number	Manufacturer's Serial Number	Owner Applied Number	Original Cost	Date Purchased	Photo Available	Video Available	Operation I.D. Marked
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

In the heading at the top of the form, on the line entitled "Property Record of" place your name, or the name of the person for whom this property list is being compiled.

- ① Place a brief description of the item here: Ex: Winchester Lever Action 22 rifle, Sony 52 Inch Plasma TV, etc.
- ② Enter the MODEL number of the item. This is an optional field. This number should not be confused with the serial number. Write the number EXACTLY as it is shown on the item: Ex: B1929xA
- ③ Enter the SERIAL number of the item. This field should be considered mandatory, if the manufacturer has assigned a unique serial number to the item. Remember that in the absence of an Owner Applied Number, this number is required in order for law enforcement to be able to enter the item into a regional or national searchable database. Enter the number EXACTLY as given including any dashes, alpha/numeric lettering, etc.. Ex: BA-12345-y, 1234-9876, etc.
- ④ If you have etched, engraved or otherwise included your own unique Owner Applied Number, such as your driver's license number, enter that number here. Otherwise, leave blank. Remember that in the absence of a Serial Number, this number is required in order for law enforcement to be able to enter the item into a regional or national searchable database. Enter the number EXACTLY as shown on the item. Ex: TX98765432DL
- ⑤ If the original cost of the item is known, place it here. If that information is unknown, enter the replacement value of the property here. If the item has been appraised (jewelry, art, etc.) enter the appraised value.
- ⑥ Enter the date the item was originally purchased or otherwise obtained by you (gift, inheritance, etc.)
- ⑦ If you have photo(s) of the item, check the "yes" box, otherwise check the "no" box.
- ⑧ If you have a video(s) of the item, check the "yes" box, otherwise check the "no" box.
- ⑨ If the item is marked by you, whether by the Owner Applied Number in item 4 above, or by some other unique mark, check the "yes" box, otherwise check the "no" box. If there is an entry in the Owner Applied Number block, check "yes."