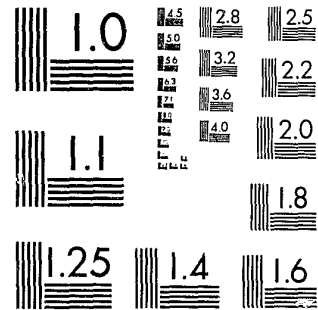


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PROGRAM GUIDE

Operation Identification

OPERATION IDENTIFICATION
GUIDE



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June, 1981

I. Introduction

Annually law enforcement agencies across the nation through criminal investigation, arrest and routine patrol recover millions of dollars worth of stolen property. In Virginia during 1980, property valued at \$120,794,644 was stolen but only 27% or \$32,358,580 of that property was recovered. A substantial portion of the recovered stolen property was motor vehicles and when motor vehicles are excluded from the total property stolen and recovered, only 11% of the stolen property was recovered. Listed below are the 1980 Virginia recovery rates of the various categories of stolen property.

Currency, Notes, etc.	- 13%	Firearms	- 12%
Jewelry and Precious Metals	- 8%	Household Goods	- 10%
Clothing and Furs	- 14%	Consumable Goods	- 9%
Motor Vehicles	- 68%	Livestock	- 25%
Office Equipment	- 13%	Miscellaneous	- 14%
TV's, Radios, etc.	- 8%	Total	- 27%

Only 27% of the stolen property was recovered, but no information is available which indicates how much of the stolen property was actually returned to the original owner. An indicator that much of the recovered stolen property is not returned to owners are the numerous public auctions conducted by law enforcement agencies across the state to clear unclaimed property from property storage areas.

The recovery rate for non-vehicular stolen property was 11%, yet the recovery rate for stolen motor vehicles was 68%. These are motor vehicles that are not only recovered but in most instances which are returned to the rightful owner. The high recovery and return rate of stolen motor vehicles is substantially due to the mandatory Vehicle Identification Number system and the computer systems which make it work. Combined with anti-theft devices, the Vehicle Identification Number system appears to have slowed the increase of auto theft compared to other crime. Auto theft decreased 6% in Virginia in 1980 and the rate of theft per 1,000 registered vehicles was 3.4 in 1980 compared to 6.0 in 1970.

The low recovery rate of property such as radios, office equipment, cameras, firearms, etc. can in part be attributed to the inability of law enforcement personnel to identify the rightful owner when such property is encountered in the possession of a suspicious person or arrested thief, or just found abandoned somewhere. Law enforcement authorities cannot identify such property because it bears no markings or serial numbers which can be used to identify and locate the owner, or the inscribed numbers are not recognizable.

There is a program, if properly implemented, which can combat this problem of unidentifiable recovered stolen property and it is most commonly known as Operation Identification. This information is intended to serve as a guide which all law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth of Virginia can utilize to develop a local Operation Identification Program.

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II. Definition

Operation Identification was begun in California in 1963 as an anti-theft program which encouraged citizens to mark their valuable property with a unique personal identifier an owner applied number (OAN), so that each item would become more readily identifiable and traceable to its rightful owner in the event of theft or loss. The objectives of Operation Identification are:

- A. To increase chances of recovery of stolen property by rightful owners.
- B. To discourage theft of marked property by increasing the likelihood that it can be traced to a legitimate owner.
- C. To deter theft of marked property by reducing the ease with which stolen property can be resold.
- D. To increase apprehension and conviction rates of theft suspects by increasing positive identification of recovered stolen property.

III. Operation

A. Engraving:

Identifying numbers or owner applied numbers (OAN's) are applied to property by permanently engraving the number with an electric engraver or manual engraving pencil or by stamping with a metal stamping device. The electric engraver and pencil can be purchased at most any hardware store at an approximate cost of six dollars for the engraver and two dollars for the pencil. The stamping devices are rather expensive, costing approximately one hundred dollars, and usually must be obtained through a special supplier.

B. Property to be engraved:

Portable property which can be easily carried away by an individual should be engraved. These are items which can easily be sold to a stolen property fence for quick cash. Examples of these types of property are:

1. Televisions
2. Cameras
3. Bicycles
4. Lawn mowers
5. Firearms
6. Tools

C. Where to engrave:

Engrave on metal where possible, in a place which law enforcement personnel can locate but so that it does not deface the property. Do not engrave on a lid or coverplate which can be easily removed.

D. Owner Applied Number:

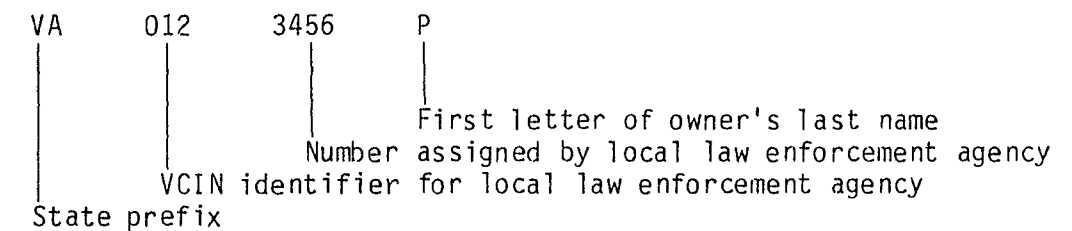
The key to the success of Operation Identification is the use of an easily recognized number system which can identify the most people. Through legislation Virginia has established the use of the Social Security number preceded by the letters "VA" as the Virginia Operation Identification system for owner applied numbers (OAN's). Virginia Code 18.2-96.1 states the following:

1. Identification of Personal Property

- a. The owner of personal property may (permanently) mark such property for the purpose of identification with the Social Security number of the owner, preceded by the letters "VA".
- b. Any person who removes, alters or conceals any identification number placed on personalty without the consent of the owner, thereof, shall be guilty of a Class I misdemeanor.

This owner applied number system (OAN) is used because it is the personal identification system most familiar to all individuals, it represents the greatest number of people and law enforcement personnel have access to the numbers through the driver's license registration files of the Virginia Division of Motor Vehicles. Although, there are many Virginians who do not have a driver's license, the Division of Motor Vehicles has the capability to issue social security numbered identifications for non-drivers.

At times the use of a social security number may not be feasible or desirable for an individual, a large business or an institution. In those instances, it is recommended that the number system sponsored by the Virginia Farm Bureau for marking farm equipment be utilized. This is a ten character number based on the following character organization:



In those situations where an initial from the owner's last name would not apply, the last character of the number would be dropped to form a nine character rather than a ten character number.

E. Unmarkable Property

There are types of property which do not lend themselves to permanent marking such as valuable jewelry, crops, furs, etc.; then alternate means of identification must be used. Photographic and descriptive records are most often used to identify jewelry. Color coded confetti has been used to identify farm products such as hay.

Because of their nature, many items will require a novel approach for identification, but whatever approach is taken the following points should be kept in mind.

1. Permanent identification
2. Ability to positively identify
3. Record of identification
4. Knowledge of identification system by law enforcement personnel

F. Property Inventory

When property is marked for identification by using an owner applied number or any other procedure, a detailed inventory of the particulars of the marked property should be made and this inventory should be stored in a

secure location. When a theft or loss occurs the inventory can be used to give a complete, descriptive report to law enforcement personnel. A sample inventory is included as appendix A.

G. Participant Sticker

Most of the theft deterrent potential of Operation Identification is in the use of window or door stickers by participants to warn potential thieves that property on the premises is marked for easy identification by law enforcement personnel. When it is verified that an individual has in fact engraved his property he is issued an Operation Identification participant sticker. Engraving should be verified before a sticker is issued because one burglary to a home which only displayed a sticker without engraving property can jeopardize the whole program. A sample sticker is show in Appendix B.

H. Participation

There are a number of ways which law enforcement, the community and individuals acting together, or on their own can foster participation in Operation Identification.

1. Direct-in-home engraving

Law enforcement and/or civic groups can sponsor a program where engravers are taken directly into homes on request or by solicitation.

2. Loan program

Law enforcement and/or civic groups can provide engravers and pertinent literature to be loaned out of public facilities such as libraries and fire stations. A sample loan agreement is attached as appendix B.

3. Engraving sessions

Civic or social organizations can schedule engraving sessions during regular organizational meetings where members bring in their valuable property to have it engraved.

4. Employment benefit

Businesses can make engravers and pertinent literature available to their employees as a fringe benefit of employment.

5. Individual participation

Individuals can act on their own to acquire an engraver and materials to mark their own property, or the property of friends and relatives.

Whatever method of participation is used, those participating should inform law enforcement personnel that the engraving has been done so records can be maintained if desired.

IV. Law Enforcement Responsibilities

A. Acquisition

Personnel should be instructed that when taking reports of stolen property, owner applied numbers (OAN's) should be obtained if available. Law enforcement personnel should request the information rather than depend on it to be volunteered.

B. Reporting

Those individuals responsible for reporting and entering stolen property into the VCIN system must be trained to recognize and then supply owner applied numbers (OAN's) when making entries into the VCIN system. The VCIN system has been able to accommodate owner applied numbers (OAN's) since 1977. The system provides for a 20 character, right justified, field between the Model field and Date of Theft on stolen property entries and inquiries. This field for owner applied numbers is identified by the message code field OAN. The system can accept any number up to twenty characters in length. It is not necessary that a Social Security number be used, although it is strongly suggested. The applicable section from the VCIN operations manual is included as Appendix C.

C. Recognition

Law enforcement personnel who encounter lost or stolen property which has been marked with an owner applied number (OAN) must be able to recognize it when it is encountered and be aware of the procedures necessary to identify the owner, ie. access the DMV driver's license file or the VCIN stolen property file.

There are a variety of owner applied number systems across the country. Some, like Virginia, use Social Security numbers; others use drivers license numbers and others use specifically assigned numbers. Just as the VCIN system, the National Crime Information Center can accept owner applied numbers (OAN's). When examining recovered property, especially in those areas bordering other states, law enforcement personnel must be alert to any engraving which may be an owner applied number (OAN).

D. Records

All law enforcement agencies are encouraged to maintain records of participants in the Operation Identification program. The records can serve as a reference without having to inquiry the DMV or VCIN computer files or act as a backup when the DMV and VCIN files are unavailable.

More importantly, the records can serve as a tool to measure the crime prevention benefits of the Operation Identification program. By using any of the below methods it can be demonstrated that Operation Identification is or is not having some effect on crime and the recovery of stolen property.

1. Before and after

Study the victimization of Operation Identification participants before entry into the program and after a reasonable period in the program.

2. Participant vs. non-participant

Study the victimization of the individuals participating in Operation Identification compared to those not participating.

3. Recovered stolen property

Relying on monthly data provided to the Uniform Crime Reporting section of the State Police, compare property recovery rates before and after Operation Identification. It may also be of value to examine records from auctions of unclaimed property to develop estimates on the rate of return of stolen property to rightful owners.

APPENDIX - A
 SAMPLE PROPERTY INVENTORY

OPERATION IDENTIFICATION Valuable Property				
AUTOMOBILE, MOTORCYCLE, SCOOTER				
	Make	Model	Lic. No.	Color
A-1				
A-2				
A-3				
A-4				
A-5				
BICYCLE				
	Make	Model	Lic. No.	Color
B-1				
B-2				
B-3				
B-4				
B-5				
GUNS				
	Make	Model	Caliber	Serial Number
C-1				
C-2				
C-3				
C-4				
C-5				
TELEVISION, TAPE RECORDER, RADIO, CB RADIO, STEREO, etc.				
	Item	Make	Model	Serial Number
D-1				
D-2				
D-3				
D-4				
D-5				
D-6				
D-7				
D-8				
D-9				
D-10				
DISHWASHER, STOVE, MIXER, TOASTER, REFRIGERATOR, etc.				
	Item	Make	Model	Serial Number
E-1				
E-2				
E-3				
E-4				
E-5				
E-6				
E-7				
E-8				
E-9				
E-10				
E-11				
E-12				
E-13				
CAMERA, BINOCULARS, WATCHES SPORTING GOODS, SEWING MACHINE, etc.				
	Item	Make	Model	Serial Number
F-1				
F-2				
F-3				
F-4				
F-5				
F-6				
F-7				
F-8				
F-9				
F-10				
F-11				
POWER TOOLS AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT				
	Item	Make	Model	Serial Number
G-1				
G-2				
G-3				
G-4				
G-5				
G-6				
G-7				
G-8				
G-9				
G-10				
G-11				
G-12				

Name _____
 Last First Initial

Address _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

I. D. Number _____

Date of Inventory _____

Law Enforcement Agency _____

OTHER PROPERTY MARKED

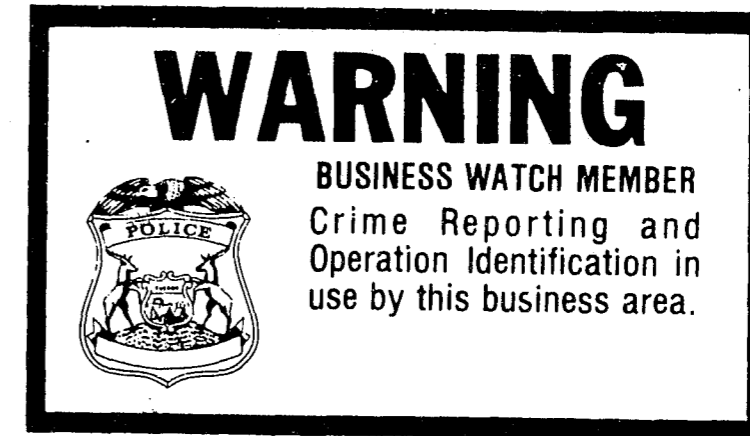
Item	Make	Model	Serial No.
H-1			
H-2			
H-3			
H-4			
H-5			
H-6			
H-7			
H-8			
H-9			
H-10			
H-11			
H-12			
H-13			
H-14			
H-15			
H-16			
H-17			
H-18			
H-19			
H-20			
H-21			
H-22			
H-23			
H-24			
H-25			
H-26			
H-27			
H-28			
H-29			
H-30			

POLICE DEPARTMENT COPY

(Please print plainly.)

APPENDIX - B

SAMPLE STICKERS



SAMPLE LOAN AGREEMENT

**OPERATION IDENTIFICATION
 LOAN AGREEMENT FOR ENGRAVING TOOLS**

Name _____ Tool Set # _____

Address _____ City _____

Driver's License No. _____ Phone No. _____ Date of Loan _____

I hereby acknowledge the receipt of one electric engraver. I agree to return the tool set by _____
 The engraver is to remain the property of Prince William County. I agree to be responsible for the tool set and to use it only for the purpose of Operation Identification. I pledge to return the electric engraver in operating condition after having marked all of the valuable items I own with the driver's license number listed above. I also agree to release Prince William County and/or any of its agencies from any liability for any accident or injury resulting from the use of the electric engraver.

OPERATION IDENTIFICATION THANKS YOU FOR YOUR HELP
 TELL YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS ABOUT IT.

 Signature of borrower

 Signature of issuing clerk

 Date of return of tool set

 Receiving clerk

APPENDIX - C

VCIN POLICY

NCIC OPERATING MANUAL

PART 5

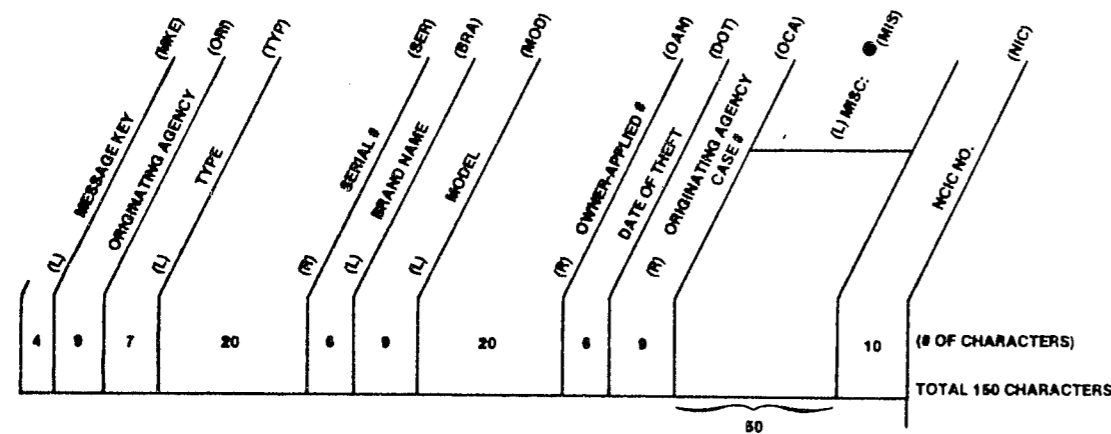
ARTICLE FILE
SECTION 1--INTRODUCTION

1.1 Criteria for Entry

Unrecovered stolen articles may be entered into file if a theft report has been made and the following circumstances are met:

- ** 1. Any item in the theft report valued at \$500 or more and having a unique manufacturer-assigned serial number and/or an owner-applied number, except for an item to be entered in the Boat, Gun, License Plate, Securities, or Vehicle File. Office equipment (adding machine, typewriter, dictating machine, etc.), a color television set, and a bicycle may be entered regardless of value.
- ** 2. If the aggregate value of the property in one theft exceeds \$5,000, any item in the theft report, regardless of value, having a unique manufacturer-assigned serial number and/or an owner-applied number.
- ** 3. Any item in the theft report, regardless of value, having a unique manufacturer-assigned serial number and/or an owner-applied number if:
 - 1. The circumstances of the theft indicate that there is a probability of interstate movement, or
 - 2. The seriousness of the crime dictates that an entry should be made for investigative purposes.

STOLEN ARTICLE FILE-RECORD FORMAT



END