

# Security marking of property

## Why do I need to consider this topic?

The security marking of property should be considered for two reasons. Firstly, as a deterrent against theft - economic security measures that deter theft are usually good for business and secondly, to assist police in solving crimes and to help the return of recovered stolen goods to their rightful owners.

The Home Office and The Association of Chief Police Officers ( ACPO) have made the following statement on this subject:-

“To assist in the prevention and detection of crime and the return of stolen property to the rightful owner, property should be marked by a method which is secure, visible and leads to the identity of the owner. In simple form an engraved postcode will suffice. Where a covert commercial product is used it should identify the owner and be supported with a secure and visible mark which leads the recovering agency to search for the product. The police service does not test products and, to avoid suggestions of product endorsement, companies offering asset marking devices and private property registers or databases should be directed to comply with Loss Prevention Certification Board standards LPS 1224 ([LPS 1224:issue 2 1999 Requirements for secure database management for use in asset marking systems](#)) and LPS 1225 ([Specifications for testing and classification of asset marking systems](#) )”

Note: This guidance does not cover security tags (of the type used to deter shoplifters) or property tracking and location systems (see our separate technical guidance note on this subject).

## What aspects do I need to consider

As intimated by the ACPO statement, property marking, for security purposes, falls into two basic categories:

- Markings that are obvious to the naked eye and
- Those that are covert.

Even with the latter type, it is still necessary to display warning signs, in order to have any deterrent effect. The drawback to this is that any thief not deterred will know to look for the marking, and may try to remove it.

In some organisations, nearly every single item is allocated an asset reference number that is recorded on a register for accounting purposes. Where this is the case, there is the opportunity to use a marking product that performs a security role as well. If yours is a business where this is not done, you will need to decide what items you wish to mark and how. You will find that a range of options to consider. With property that is always used indoors, you will find a wider selection of property marking products to choose from; however, for items that may be used outdoors in all weathers, there will be fewer alternatives.

In some cases, for items which may be attractive to thieves, you may not be their owner, i.e. they may be leased or rented. Many leasing and rental companies will not permit permanent markings to be made to their goods. You will need to check this with any such firms you are using, before proceeding to mark their property. If there are items that may be sold, when no longer required, you will need to consider whether the use of permanent markings will reduce their value, and if so whether this is acceptable to you.

Permanent highly visible markings are usually achieved by engraving, chemical etching or ink systems, i.e. a method that affects the surface of the property. It is a deterrent because from a thieves' point of view it reduces the resale value of the goods for them (gouging the surface still

gives the item an unattractive and possibly stolen look) and is hard to explain if caught in receipt of such marked goods. Police also believe that businesses that security mark their goods are less likely to suffer repeat thefts, i.e. by the same thieves.

An alternative to overt engraving or etching is the use of a proprietary security marking plate, label or sticker product that has your details on it and is then glued or chemically bonded to the item. The success of this method rests upon how securely the plate, label or sticker is fixed to the object.

Covert markings are available in several different forms:

- Microdots that are microscopic marking labels upon which either a code number or other details are marked. The dots are concealed on or inside the property
- The use of a chemical trace product such as Smart Water ®, which is a solution whose chemical formulation is unique to each business user. Examination of even minute traces left on a recovered product can be used by the Forensic Science Service to identify the owner of the property
- Use of a marking method that may be familiar to pet owners such as the Radio frequency identification tag (RF/id). When a scanning device is close to the object, information encoded onto a tag can be read by the scanner. Tags, which may be as small as a grain of rice, may be embedded into materials that are relatively transparent to radio waves, e.g. wood or plastic, surface mounted (e.g. within a label) on metal goods, or incorporated into packaging. The "read/write" version of these tags allows information to be added or removed if required. One disadvantage is that, at present, not all police forces may possess the scanners needed to check recovered items. RF/id tags can be used for a wide range of applications, e.g. asset tracking, operating security systems etc.
- The form of marking with which most people are familiar is the Ultra Violet (UV) pen, used to create "invisible writing" on items, and which can only be read under UV light. Police advice is that this method should be used as the sole method of security marking only when other methods, such as visible permanent markings, are not possible or are inappropriate.

You will need to decide whether you will be keeping details of the marked products yourselves or will rely on a third party database. There are now a number of organisations and businesses who will offer to hold such information for you, but ACPO have advised as follows "companies offering asset marking devices and private property registers or databases should be directed to comply with Loss Prevention Certification Board standards LPS 1224 ([LPS 1224:issue 2 1999 Requirements for secure database management for use in asset marking systems](#))". Details of these can be found in the Red Book on the [LPCB web site](#) .

Under LPS 1224, all personnel have to undergo successful security vetting. The Secure Database Register has to be "located in a secure area within a protected building, manned 24 hours a day and have secure areas for data management and storage within defined security perimeters and strategically located barriers with, where practicable, electronic surveillance and/or alarm systems in place".

LPS 1225 is also accredited by The Loss Prevention Certification Board, being the "Specification for testing and classifying asset marking systems". It has a two-part product classification designed to indicate the resistance of the product to eradication of ownership traceability and resistance to complete removal of marking without leaving evidence of previous existence. The scheme allows for the use of an asset identification code that uniquely identifies the marked asset but also allows for it to be transferred should the owner relocate, sell or cancel ownership of the asset.

Finally, the Government's Crime Reduction web site also suggests some questions for any such database operators, should you choose to go down this route, and is worth looking at.

## **What key actions do I need to take?**

Either choose to operate a full asset recording system (where all objects are marked) or select items likely to be attractive to thieves for property marking. If the selected items include any that are not owned by you, e.g. rented or leased items, check with rental or leasing company before marking them.

Decide if you are going to use an overt permanent system (such as engraving or etching), an overt system such as plate or label stuck to the object (possibly carrying an identification code that can be transferred later if required), or a covert system such as a chemical trace product, microdots or RF/id tag. Display suitable warning signs for deterrent purposes. Where marked items are to be used outdoors, check that the marking product is suitable for this.

Choose any database register firm with care; ideally use one approved under the LPCB LPS 1224 scheme. If you do not use a third party register, ensure that you keep serial numbers of your goods in a safe place.