



Historical Records Theft: Strategies for Prevention and Response

What to Do When There Is an Incident or a Theft-In-Progress

Print out a copy of this sheet and keep it a convenient place in the reference room for staff to refer to during an incident or theft-in-progress.

Suspicious Behavior: By Researcher or Visitor

When you see suspicious behavior or believe a researcher may be engaging in theft or mutilation, begin with a “customer service” approach:

- Provide yourself with an opportunity to better assess the situation. Engage the researcher and offer help. Make eye contact. Provide the researcher with a copy of the Reference Room rules.
- If the behavior persists, remind the researcher of the rules and affirm your authority. Quietly let your supervisor know what you have done.
- If the interaction devolves into confrontation, summon a supervisor to defuse the situation.

Theft-in-Progress: By Researcher or Visitor

With a theft-in-progress, the DON'Ts are as important as the DOs.

DON'T

- Do not detain, confront, or interrogate the subject.
- Do not touch or physically search the subject.
- Do not speak to the subject without another staff member present.

DO:

- Discreetly alert a supervisor (and security staff, if you have one) so as not to tip off the subject or others in the research room.
- Engage the subject. Taking a customer service approach has been effective in halting thefts-in-progress. Ask if they require additional assistance or if they have found everything they are looking for.
- Remind the subject of the rules, but refrain from making accusations. This attention may prompt the subject to replace items before leaving the premises.
- Redirect any surveillance cameras onto the subject, if possible.
- If interaction with a suspicious subject devolves into confrontation, summon a supervisor.
- Do not attempt to stop a fleeing subject, but do attempt to get their license plate number or vehicle make and model.



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- Conduct a routine exit search of the subject's research materials upon exit, if authorized.
- Prepare an incident report that includes the name of the subject, any identifying characteristics, the records accessed, and the date/time of the incident. Any other staff who witnessed the incident should submit an independent Incident Report or witness statement.
- In consultation with your supervisor and security staff, contact the appropriate law enforcement agency if there is clear evidence of theft.

Theft-in-Progress: By Staff

Knowing how to respond to suspicious behavior exhibited by a staff member is challenging. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. The appropriate response will vary from institution to institution depending on size and governance. And then there are the inevitable questions: What is your reporting relationship with the suspected thief? How can you be sure that he/she does not have cohorts?

For most co-workers the idea of such betrayal is unthinkable and too easily dismissed. Here are some considerations.

- Check your organization's Human Resources policies, if applicable, to determine if there are existing guidelines for reporting fraud or abuse on the job.
- If you see something, say something. If you have evidence of or have witnessed theft by staff, you must report it.
- Report your concern to your supervisor. If you perceive that he/she might have a conflict of interest, report up the line.
- Do not share your suspicions casually with colleagues. Don't gossip or spread rumors.