

Returning stolen goods to owners a tough task

Police can't trace unidentified items, expert says

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EDMONTON - Police will face a real challenge trying to find the owners of \$280,000 worth of recovered stolen goods, says money-laundering expert Chris Mathers.

"They'll be lucky to identify 10 per cent of it," he said.

Without identifying who the property belongs to, police can't lay charges.

On Feb. 23, Edmonton police found roughly 400 stolen items including power tools, building supplies and home electronics after a tip about a stolen truck led them to a north-end residence.

Police announced charges Tuesday, but only 37 out of the 400 items have been returned to the owners, said acting detective James Vanderland.

Anyone who thinks their belongings might be in the find can go to the north division police station and look through a binder of photographs.

While the value of the find is impressive, most finds of this size don't result in as many charges, said Mathers.

"It's a good bust," he said. "But it's really difficult to identify these things."

The Toronto-based crime expert worked as an undercover RCMP officer for 20 years, then published a book on money laundering.

He now gives workshops on theft prevention and money laundering across the country.

From the recent find, the items marked with company names or with serial numbers were registered with police as stolen, and have already been returned to their owners, Vanderland said. The rest are stored in a police warehouse.

One local construction company marked all its equipment with blue and orange paint. Police called the owner when they found his name and number written on one item. He went through the photographs and identified nine items from the blue and orange marks.

Other companies haven't made similar efforts, Vanderland said. Often if the theft is less than their \$10,000 insurance deductible, they don't report the theft to the police, passing the cost off instead to the end consumer. One oil refinery



CREDIT: John Lucas, The Journal

Edmonton acting police detective James Vanderland with recovered stolen items in the police warehouse on Tuesday March 25.

east of the city has a \$100,000 deductible.

"We need companies to call us," Vanderland said. "You need to document it. You need to help us out, too."

Most of the stolen goods were found in a home near 118th Avenue and 58th Street. Police got a tip about a stolen truck and sent several plainclothes officers who watched three people load the truck with power tools stored in the garage.

Officers pulled over the truck, then searched the house and found more than 300 power tools, high-end electronics and bicycles in the house, on three flat-deck trailers in the yard and in the garage.

They found 65 more items, mainly building supplies and power tools, in a storage unit across the city.

Police arrested a 43-year-old man driving the stolen truck, a 29-year-old woman living in the rented house, and issued a warrant for a 34-year-old man who also lives at the house. They've been charged with 20 counts of possession of stolen property among them.

The couple had only been renting the house for a month, Vanderland said. The house seemed to be a collection point, where stolen goods would be bought for cents on the dollar and resold.

"I think it's all small-time guys," he said. "It's the same group, but how organized they are, I don't know."

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