

Stopping crime one laptop at a time

Campus police offers STOP anti-theft security plate and database to campus community

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by Sonnet L'Abbé

Easy to carry, easy to tuck away in a knapsack — the very attributes that make laptops such popular and valuable tools also make them easy to steal. In fact laptops are one of the most commonly stolen items on campus. But U of T police corporal Peter Franchi has implemented a plan to reduce the theft of laptops and other personal property at U of T with a registration system called STOP (security tracking of office property).

The STOP anti-theft system involves purchasing a security plate and affixing it to a laptop or other personal property. The plate, available from campus police for \$20, features a bar code and the word STOP written across it in big, bold letters. U of T Police Service staff record the purchaser's information and register it with the company that administers STOP. They maintain a database that U of T police can update and access 24 hours a day.

"It acts first and foremost as a deterrent," Franchi said. "People who are stealing laptops on campus are doing it for personal gain. They plan to sell the laptop."

If the sight of the plate alone does not deter theft, the challenge of removing the plate might. The thief will have to use at least 800 pounds of force to pry it loose. If the plate is removed without doing irreparable damage to the item, underneath is a permanent tattoo that indicates the property is stolen and again provides the 1-800 number to report the theft.

This diminishes the value of the stolen property because no pawn shop will accept stolen goods. Any laptop reported found will be recovered by U of T police at no additional cost. "So, if you leave your laptop lying around at the airport and security picks it up, as they often do, they'll give us a call and we'll go recover it."

U of T will be the first university in Canada to use the STOP system but Franchi said he looked for a solution that had already been proven effective. "Harvard, Yale and UCLA have been using the STOP system for anywhere from five to 10 years," he said. "They have noticed a dramatic reduction in the amount of personal property stolen as well as university property such as projectors and CPUs."

Franchi said U of T police are also exploring the option of offering smaller plates for use on bikes since bike theft is also high in Toronto. He expects the smaller plates to be available in September. Property plates are available as of July 1.

"I've been meeting with the various heads of faculties and departments, encouraging them to register their laptops, their CPUs, their overhead projectors, as soon as they can," Franchi said, "because it really is a very good system. It's the best way to deter crime and to diminish the resale value of the property."

Call campus police at 416-978-2323 for more information.



U of T Police Service corporal Peter Franchi displays STOP security tag.

Image: Pascal Paquette