



Insider Theft

by Stevan P. Layne, CPP, CIPM

The most recent issue of AAM's AVISO opened with an article about an incident of theft from the Wisconsin Historical Society, committed by a former curator of anthropology. The article's author voiced concern that the penalty for art theft might not be severe enough to deter such crimes, and voiced that concern to the U.S. Sentencing Commission. The article states, "Though art theft is not uncommon, it is rarely perpetrated by an insider. I'm still a bit shocked to realize that not everyone shares the common knowledge that the highest ratio of thefts in cultural institutions involves employees, volunteers, or student workers. I'm even more amazed to find the opposite being stated and published by an organization that should know better."

In a letter to the Special Assistant to the President and CEO of AAM, I advised that the Association needs to be more attuned to the facts, and that even the more highly publicized incidents of theft in recent years have pointed to inside involvement. I followed that letter with a request to over two dozen institutions to verify my position that thefts they experienced involved insiders more often than not. In the twenty plus responses received to date....every one had a story to tell about some form of theft committed by insiders with few acknowledging losses from outside sources. Every level of staff (including directors) has been found to be involved in theft, which in some cases, went undetected for years. Several reports voiced concern that although sound evidence was provided, some administrations failed to prosecute, or even report the matter. And we wonder how someone who stole from one institution might get hired at another? Volunteers, for the most part, a group of dedicated individuals who help to lighten the institution's financial burden, have also been found to lighten their asset burden...with some self-help removal of everything from cash to artifacts. I once asked an audience of about 200 museum administrators how many performed objective background checks on volunteers. Three hands were raised.

In both "Suggested Guidelines for Museum Security," published by the ASIS Standing Committee for Museum, Library & Cultural Property Security, and "The Cultural Property Protection Manual," published by Layne Consultants International, we emphasize the need to conduct reasonable background checks on all employees, volunteers, temporary workers - and everyone with any access to collections or assets. With the present state of world affairs and the recognized ability of foreign nationals to infiltrate any organization, there is no excuse for failing to exercise these procedures.

Those of us who have worked within our cultural institutions have faced policies that in essence keep embarrassing incidents "under the table," rather than upset governing boards or the public who relies on the institution to protect its valuable treasures. However, theft of artwork, cash, artifacts, or any other property of the institution is a crime. The person who commits the crime of theft, regardless of their education, dedication to "the arts," level of employment, or professional accomplishments...is still a criminal, and needs to be handled as such. This is an expectation of the justice system that is supposed to treat everyone equally.

There are some minds that will never be changed...administrations that will not bend. For those charged with the protection of institutional property, there is only one path to follow. That is in the objective observation, documentation, and processing of evidence, compilation of material fact, and written presentation of findings. This article voices the opinions of the author, and by acclamation of the Advisory Board, the position of the International Foundation for Cultural Property Protection.

Suicide Bombers

As routinely indicated in news reports from the Middle East, suicide bombings remain a preferred method of attack by extremists and we should be aware of the possibility of such attacks in the United States. Suicide bombings utilize either a person or a vehicle to deliver the explosive device(s), with murder as the primary objective. Note that on May 21, 2004, NYPD and Port Authority police began checking trucks entering New York City via bridges and tunnels. They also will check trucks already in the city if they appear suspicious.

There is no clearly defined profile of a suicide bomber; the individual can be a man, woman, or older child. The following indicators, especially when more than one indicator is observed, can possibly denote a suicide bomber:

- Wearing inappropriate (loose or bulky) clothing that is inconsistent with current weather conditions
- Protruding bulges or exposed wires under clothing (possible through the sleeve)
- Strange chemical odors
- Sweating, mumbling prayers, or unusually calm and detached behavior
- Attempting to gain a position near crowds or VIPs
- Tightened hands (may hold detonation device)

Wearing disguises such as military, medic, firefighter, or police uniforms or posing as a pregnant woman or member of the clergy to elude detect.