

MINNEAPOLIS

For the package thief who has everything: Doo-doo-in-a-box

A Minneapolis man used excrement in a box to teach the porch bandits a lesson -- and exact a little payback.

By Mary Lynn Smith (<http://www.startribune.com/mary-lynn-smith/10645991/>) Star Tribune |

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A Minneapolis man gave some pesky porch pirates a little payback — poop.

When his surveillance camera caught thieves stealing a package off his front steps, he boxed up his dog's doo-doo as a little surprise for the next thief who dared steal from him. Soon poop packages were flying off his porch in the arms of unsuspecting thieves, including one that disappeared 90 minutes after he put it outside his front door.

Neighbors who learned via social media about his foul revenge cheered him because thieves also had pilfered their packages at one time or another.



"Everyone in the neighborhood said it's a huge problem," he said. They said: "I'll donate more poop for you," said the man who asked not to be identified because of possible retribution from thieves.

The Minneapolis man came up with the idea for the surprise packages after neighborhood kids stole a padded envelope that contained a \$10 watchband from his front porch. He knew the package had been delivered that day. But when he got home, it wasn't there. His home surveillance video showed a group of neighborhood elementary school kids wearing school backpacks who had congregated near the street outside his house. Eventually, one ran up and swiped the envelope.

"They probably were out there daring someone to run up and grab the package," he said.

That's when he decided to teach the next thief a lesson. "I thought I could have fun with this," he said. "I thought, what could I do to disappoint these kids the most?"

His answer: Put together a fake expensive device and fill the package with poop. "It's the biggest letdown you could give someone. That's what I was going for. ... It was an innocent prank."

He took an old iPhone box and wrote iPoo on it, drew a thumbsdown-emoji and scrawled "crime stinks" on an Apple sticker. He placed it in a packing box and placed it on his porch. It was gone in two days and he replaced it with another, and then another and another. As the holidays drew near, the packages were stolen faster.

"The first one was an elaborate prank, but it was happening too often and too quickly. I got lazier with the notes," he said. "I couldn't keep up with the demand."

No longer just kids

Examining the surveillance video of each heist, he discovered he no longer was dealing with kids. "I was dealing with something bigger — real criminals. These were adults jumping out of cars, grabbing and taking off in their cars."



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_15138985511817)
DREAMSTIME

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As online shopping has grown, so have opportunities for thieves to troll neighborhoods in search of packages. The holidays mean even more packages left at front doors and more opportunities for bandits.

“Last year, it was almost like an epidemic,” said Lakeville Police Lt. Jason Polinski. “But not this year. ... It’s been quiet.”

It could be because thieves jump to different communities, he surmised. “It’s usually a small group of people responsible for 25 to 30 thefts in a community.”

Some homeowners have installed cameras to monitor who comes to their doors, and that can be a “good investigative tool” when a theft occurs, Polinski said. “But it’s not a cure-all.”

Some crooks aren’t deterred by the threat of being captured on camera. “They see them everywhere,” Polinski said. And while the images captured by some cameras are better than nothing, they sometimes aren’t good enough to identify the criminal, he said.

In Columbia Heights, police Sgt. Matt Markham said a homeowner’s surveillance video was good enough to catch a thief. The homeowner posted the video to social media, and information from an anonymous tipster led to a woman’s arrest. Police are looking for a man who was captured stealing from a home across the street, Markham said.

In Edina, police used a decoy package made to look like a laptop box with a GPS device to track down the man who stole it.

“That’s a great idea,” said Polinski. “I’ll have to steal that idea from them,” he said. Investigators have used that tactic to capture drug dealers after a package with drugs is stopped at the post office, he said.

Fouling a theft with pet excrement in a box is an interesting concept, Polinski added. “Another interesting thing would be to put an electrical shock on the box,” he joked. “Just a little zap.”

The idea of pranking the thieves seemed funny at first to the Minneapolis man. But now he has second thoughts, fearing a thief might retaliate. He hasn’t set out a decoy package for a few days.

He’s read the news stories and the profiles of those caught stealing. “This is not just kids running around being kids,” he said. “Holy cow, this is a serious issue. ... Everyone was supportive and excited about what I was doing, thinking I’m trying to right this wrong. It became a rallying cry.”

He was just trying to teach kids a lesson, not be a crusader, he said. “It really kind of took on a life of its own,” he added.

Sadly, he said, doo-doo in a box probably didn’t put much of a dent in crime.