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New Yorkers should be vigilant amid 'rise' in mail theft, AG says. How to protect yourself

Eduardo Cuevas - New York State Team - Published 5:06 am ET Jan. 17, 2023

New Yorkers should be on the defensive against mail theft amid recent rises in stolen mail, including checks and credit cards, Attorney General Letitia James' office said this week.

"Stealing mail is a violation of privacy, it is a federal crime, and it causes real problems," James said in a statement.



Stolen mail can lead to identity theft and "destroyed credit card ratings" if bad actors get a hold of people's personal and financial information, she added.

New York State Attorney General Letitia James speaks during a commemoration Dec. 14, 2022 of the 2019 Monsey machete attack that occurred at a rabbi's Hanukkah Party. The commemoration took place at Ramapo Town Hall. *Seth Harrison/The Journal News*

What is mail theft?

Mail theft is a felony under federal law, and could be penalized by up to five years in prison. This a different offense than mail fraud, which involves someone's intent to defraud others via the mail system. That is also a felony but an offender could face up to 20 years in prison and fines of up to \$250,000.

Where has this been a problem in NY?

It's unclear exactly how much mail theft has increased. James' office didn't immediately respond to an email inquiry Thursday.

U.S. Rep. Grace Meng, D-Queens, raised concerns in December about mail theft from green relay boxes, the bolted-shut USPS property for postal workers to store mail while on delivery. She recommended USPS decrease the time mail is stored inside the boxes, add more locks and notify the public when mail in relay boxes have been stolen.



Pedestrians pass a USPS mailbox on Fulton Street in the Brooklyn borough of New York, Monday, Aug. 17, 2020. *John Minchillo, AP*

“Constituents need to know that their mail, property and information is safe, and that is why the security of these relay boxes is so important,” Meng said in a statement.

In December, James’ office indicted five people for deed theft. They are accused of stealing three homes in southeast Queens worth more than \$1 million from elderly homeowners, she wrote to U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy in a letter dated Tuesday. Deed theft often starts with mail addressed to or sent by USPS customers, James added.



New Yorkers should be on the defensive against mail theft amid recent rises in stolen mail, including checks and credit cards, Attorney General Letitia James’ office said in January 2023. *KirillAmula/Getty Images*

How can you protect yourself?

The state’s top prosecutor released the following tips:

- **Pick up your mail promptly.** Do not leave it in your mailbox overnight. If you are expecting checks, credit cards, or any other financial items to be delivered, ask a trusted friend or neighbor to pick up your mail.
- **Report possible lost mail.** If you did not receive a check or other valuable mail you were expecting, contact the issuing agency immediately.
- **Did you move?** If you change your address, you should immediately notify your respective post office and anyone with whom you do business with via mail.
- **Are you traveling?** Inform your post office when you’ll be out of town, so they can hold your mail until you return.
- **Use email notifications.** Consider signing up for USPS’ Informed Delivery service, which provides email notifications for incoming mail and packages.
- **Contact police.** If you suspect your mail was stolen or you see mail theft in progress, contact police immediately and then report it to Postal Inspectors by calling 877-876-2455.
- **Report sticky substances.** If you see glue, tape, or any other sticky substances on a mailbox, report it to your post office, Postal Inspectors, or the New York Division of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS). The USPIS can be reached at 212-330-2400.