

CLUSTER MAILBOX THEFT/SECURITY FAQ

Who is responsible for maintenance and repairs of cluster mailboxes?

According to the U.S. Postal Service (Post Office Operations Manual Section 632.11), “the purchase, installation, and maintenance of mail receptacles are the responsibility of the customer.” Mailboxes are installed by developers of homes under the supervision and guidelines set forth by the US Postal Service. The USPS neither recommends nor endorses any particular equipment vendor, but can offer help selecting cluster mailboxes. Mailbox vandalism and theft is now affecting nearly every community throughout the country. According to federal law ([Title 18, United States Code, Section 1705](#)), it is “a crime to vandalize mailboxes (or to injure, deface or destroy any mail deposited in them). Violators can be fined up to \$250,000, or imprisoned for up to three years, for each act of vandalism.” However, it is unlikely that a violator would be prosecuted to the maximum extent of federal law. Instead, most prosecutions occur at the local and state level.

We want to go back to curbside mailboxes at each driveway!

Unfortunately, this is simply not an option. Under pressure to cut costs wherever possible, the USPS requires builders and developers to purchase and install cluster mailboxes. USPS spends approximately \$30 billion annually delivering mail. According to sources, door-to-door delivery costs about \$353 per year for each address. Curbside delivery runs about \$224. Cluster mailboxes cost \$160 per address annually. Additionally, cluster mailboxes substantially reduces accidents, workers compensation injuries, and missed deliveries. Finally, Murrieta is no longer a small town. Instead, the population is now over 114,000 at over 26,000 residential addresses alone (not including commercial). The size and population of Murrieta make it impossible to return to curbside or door-to-door delivery.

What should I do if my mailbox is broken into?

If you see a crime in progress or you suspect a mailbox break-in is occurring, please call the Murrieta Police Department (MPD), 911 emergency line. If the crime has already occurred, please report the vandalism to the MPD Non-Emergency line at (951) 696-3615 **AND** the Postal Inspectors Office by calling 1-877-876-2455 or visiting <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov>. It may also be helpful for you to alert your neighbors and your Home Owners Association (where applicable). Reporting mailbox break-ins, theft, or vandalism is important for prevention of future damage and to track criminal activity.



Why are criminals targeting mail?

By and large, mailbox vandalism and theft is a crime of opportunity. In other words, criminals are looking for electronics and other goods they can sell quickly, confidential information that can be used in ID theft, or checks that can be forged. As most of these vandalism cases occur in the middle of the night, it becomes clear that if residents emptied their mail each day, the profit incentive would be reduced drastically for this crime. The MPD encourages all residents to be mindful of reducing the potential crimes by locking their cars and homes, installing video cameras and additional lights, emptying mailboxes daily, and securing all personal items.



Why is mailbox vandalism increasing?

Unfortunately, on three separate occasions, the state legislature or the voters in California have voted to allow the early release of convicted offenders (AB 109, Proposition 47 and Proposition 57). This has created a serious burden for the Murrieta Police Department. The MPD has increased patrols and investigations since being tasked with this added responsibility, and this comes at a significant cost to the taxpayers.

How can I help?

The number one step you and your community can take to helping the MPD is to stay vigilant in the reporting of crime. The Postal Inspectors Office and MPD ask that people not to confront criminals directly as they may be dangerous. If the crime is in progress, call 911. Be alert and try to remember important details (such as a license plate, vehicle description, physical description, etc.). If you notice vandalism has already occurred, report it to the Murrieta Police Department (951) 696-3615 AND to the Postal Inspector at 1-877-876-2455 as soon as possible. When crimes go unreported, it is impossible for the Murrieta Police Department to analyze trends and devote the appropriate resources necessary to thwart future occurrences. Secondly, please communicate with your neighbors and let them know how important it is to check their mailboxes daily. When possible, get to know your mail carrier's usual delivery time to your mailbox, and retrieve your mail as soon as possible. Criminals do not want to be noticed, and if there is a community presence, the chance of mailbox vandalism is greatly reduced. Third, organize a Neighborhood Watch Program and report anything suspicious. Information on neighborhood watch programs can be found on the Murrieta Police Department's website. Fourth, install lights that shine on the mailboxes and/or a video camera. Fifth, never send cash in the mail. And when you need to order more bank checks, ask if you can have the checks delivered to the bank's location. And finally, consult with your local Postmaster for the most up-to-date regulations on mailboxes.