

What we can do if valuables are taken from an auto in our parking lots.

But what if your wallet, purse, cell phone, laptop or other valuables are stolen?

Pick-pockets, purse snatchers and other thieves have the potential to turn their victims lives in disarray and cost them a lot of time and money. For instance, thieves can use their victim's information to obtain credit and make expensive purchases such as a cell phone plan or high-priced electronics. There are ways to prevent wallet and purse theft, but it doesn't take much time to plan ahead and be prepared in the event that your wallet or purse is stolen. Here are some tips from the Charles County Sheriff's Office for safeguarding your information:

- Know what's in your wallet. Make a front-and-back photocopy of each credit card, health insurance card, your driver's license—everything. That way, you will know exactly what was lost, and you will have the important account numbers and phone numbers on each item. Be sure to keep the copies in a safe place.
- Once you discover the theft, immediately report it to police.
- Call all the companies that you have accounts with to notify them of the theft. A criminal can't do much with a canceled credit card.
- Call the three national credit reporting agencies and the Social Security Administration and have them place a fraud alert on your name and social security number. By doing this, any company that checks your credit must contact you by phone so you can authorize the new credit. Those phone numbers are:

Equifax: 1-800-525-6285

Experian (formerly TRW): 1-888-397-3742

Trans Union: 1-800-680-7289

Social Security Administration, fraud line: 1-800-269-0271

If your wallet is stolen, report the theft to local police.

