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Help for lost and stolen phones
Mobile phone owners are being urged to register their phones with a national database of handset ID numbers



Backed by the police the Mobile Equipment National Database is intended to get phones back to phone owners if their handset is lost or stolen.

The database has been created as crime statistics show that more than 50% of street crime involves a mobile phone.

And a survey reveals that more than half of all mobile phone users have lost a phone in the last three years.

Lost and found

Although administered by a private firm the Mend database has the backing of police forces in the UK.

Adam Lindsay, crime prevention officer with the National Mobile Phone Crime Unit, said that the scheme was currently being promoted to those living in London.

About 80% of British adults own or regularly use a mobile phone according to figures gathered by the Office of National Statistics. Ownership figures are even higher for those aged between 15 and 34.

Mr Lindsay said that currently more than 10,000 phones are lost or stolen every month. Transport for London, which oversees the capital's travel infrastructure, currently finds more than 600 phones per month on its buses, trains and tubes.

"Previously we've asked people to use a UV pen to write their post code on their phone," said Mr Lindsay.

But, he added, this was becoming less effective because thieves were using their own UV pens to scribble over any post code they found written on a handset.

Those signing up to use the free database should register the IMEI or equipment number of their handset, said Mr Lindsay.

Most phones will show this IMEI number if users punch in *#06#.

Changing the IMEI number was much more difficult said Mr Lindsay and should mean that people do get their registered phones returned to them if they are recovered or found.

Mr Lindsay said the subsidies that phone operators apply to handsets means that legitimate users get them cheap but they represent an object of high value to thieves.

Often, said Mr Lindsay, drug dealers will accept a phone instead of cash as payment.

Statistics show that 11% of all crime involves a mobile phone, said Mr Lindsay.

Access to the database was limited to the police, said Mr Lindsay. Organisations, such as Transport for London, that want to return lost phones to owners will have to apply via e-mail.

Dial *#06# to find out your phone's ID number

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Figures gathered by replacement phone firm Retrofone show that a lot of people regularly lose their handset.

A survey conducted by Retrofone found that almost 52% of those questioned have lost their phone in the last three years.

One person questioned was unlucky enough to drop their handset into the toilet at the Glastonbury Festival.

More than a quarter, 26%, of those who responded said they had lost two or more phones in the same period.

Olly Tagg, founder of Retrofone, said he started up the service as many people did not want to pay lots of money to replace the expensive handset they had just lost.

Mr Tagg used to buy and sell old phones on eBay but has now set up a dedicated firm selling old, reconditioned handsets to people who want a replacement.

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