

Stash This Text! (Or Even Better, Burn It)

anonymous

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Imagine that you and your friends are engaged in some sort of resistance effort. Someone gets identified. Law enforcement raids their house (or their tent/treehouse/cave) and finds zines, journals, clothes, weapons, and other incriminating materials.

That friend is going to have a hard time in court.

We've seen this nightmare play out over and over again, yet it's relatively easy to avoid by taking some simple precautions. The most obvious is don't get caught and don't get identified: It's better to have perfect plans and operational security than hope your fallback tactics will save you. Yet no matter how hard we try, there's always a chance of slipping up. The next best thing is to keep nothing incriminating around: what doesn't exist can't be used as evidence against you.

As a last resort, if you must hold on to items that may not look good in court, try keeping them safe in stash spots: places where you can securely hide incriminating stuff before actions. The appropriate use of stash spots will allow you and your friends to sleep more soundly at night, and when the shit hits the fan, the feds won't be able to find your terrorism diary, or your [redacted]. (I'm joking about the terrorism diary; don't ever keep that around.)

Goals and Principles

Stash spots help you keep doing what you want while avoiding the tragic moment in court when the evidence presented against you makes you feel like you're going to vomit. Stash spots do this by aiming to ensure that three goals are met:

1. you can access and use your stuff when needed (Goal 1);
2. law enforcement cannot find your stuff (Goal 2);
3. if law enforcement finds your stuff, it cannot be traced to you (Goal 3).

These three goals are always in tension. Goal 1 is best met by keeping stuff in your car or apartment, but that would violate Goal 2 if they do a raid, and Goal 3 if they find something during a raid. Goals 2 and 3 could be best met by throwing all your stuff into a large body of water, but that would violate Goal 1. How you balance these three goals should depend on the severity of the risk of having those materials discovered: the greater the risk, the more you should focus on Goal 2 and 3 over Goal 1.

A few principles can help you meet these goals. Distance and concealment help with Goal 2: the further away your stuff is from your normal place of living, working, and transportation, the harder it is for them to find it (distance), and the harder your stuff is to sense and access, the less likely it is to be discovered and retrieved (concealment). The no trace principle can help with Goal 3: there's no DNA, no fingerprints, no surveillance camera footage, no identification documents, et cetera, in or near your stash.

While it's rarely possible to completely meet all three goals using these principles, putting in some serious effort to get as close as possible to each of them is usually worth it. When my stash spots have been discovered, it has almost always been obvious to me that I was being lazy and could have put in more effort for more payoff. Make a stash spot for your stuff, then make it better, then make it better again, until you're sure nobody will find it except you.

Some Tips

Adhering to the distance, concealment, and no trace principles should give you very good starting spots for your stashes. Below are some additional tips that elaborate and expand upon these principles to help make your stash spots even better.

- a) The stash spot should be within bicycling or walking distance of where it will be used.
 - It's almost always advisable to walk or bicycle to where you want to use your stuff, rather than use a car. Have your zine collection near the distro site or your materials a 10 minute walk to the target. This ensures that the access part of Goal 1 is met.
- b) The stash spot should be protected from the elements.
 - If the spot has some kind of natural (tree, cave) or artificial (bridge, railroad) cover that protects it from the elements, that can help ensure the use part of Goal 1 is met. If needed, find a sturdy plastic container for your stuff. I've buried my laptop wrapped in plastic bags inside a plastic container (turned off, hard drive encrypted) in a hot zone and it was not found by law enforcement and worked just fine when I retrieved it after their sweeps.
- c) The stash spot should be impossible to discover without prior knowledge.
 - Many times my stash spot has been discovered because I was lazy. I put my stuff under a bush rather than burying it under that bush. My stuff was 10 feet off a trail rather than 100 feet. Combine multiple ways of preventing access to make it nearly impossible to discover: climbing, crawling, digging, etc. This tip should help you meet Goal 2. Be sure to make a good mental map of where to find your stash spot so that you can recover your stuff and not lose it in the absence of a paper trail.
- d) The stash spot should not be close to where you live, work, or typically have activities.
 - Do not use your backyard or land that you own. Don't stash along typical routes or places you frequent, like your favorite info shop or your best friend's squat. This will help you meet goals 2 and 3.
- e) The stash should not have anything identifying in or around it.
 - Do not hide your passport along with your tannerite. Goal 3. This may seem obvious, but I've seen it happen!
- f) The stash spot should have at least 1 mile of no surveillance on the path to it and the path away from it.
 - Suppose you are stashing bloc for a protest or an action, and a surveillance camera sees you enter an area then leave the area a few minutes later with different clothing. This stuff happens. I've heard stories of people removing their bloc under a camera! Give yourself a 10-20 minute walk with no surveillance cameras (1-2 miles) to make sure this doesn't happen, and Goal 3 is met.
- g) Make sure your stash spot stays concealed when the seasons change.
 - If you hide your stuff in some trees or bushes in the summer, be sure that your stuff will stay hidden in the fall and winter. Plants that stay green year round are a good idea, or at least know what the area looks like in the winter before using it to stash your stuff.

Bad and good stash spot examples

Bad : In the closet at a friend's squat.

Good : Buried under a hidden floorboard in an abandoned building along a path to where you hope to use the stuff.

Bad : Under some bushes near your tent (I've even seen IN someone's tent).

Good : Buried in a hole under thick underbrush in a plastic container a half mile from the target. Burial spot is covered with surrounding leaves to blend in.

Bad : On a ledge in a high traffic railroad underpass.

Good : 100 feet away from the high traffic railroad underpass in the woods, under a bush, covered properly.

Bad : In your cabin in a remote location in Lincoln Montana.

Good : In a hidden workshop (a cave or underground if possible) an hour bike from your cabin in Lincoln Montana.

Bad : Under a tree near ground camp.

Good : In the canopy of some reasonably tall evergreen trees that can be free climbed, located 30 minutes from ground camp on foot.

Bad : In an abandoned bus in the city.

Good : In an abandoned bus buried underground at an abandoned junkyard in the desert.

Bad : Behind a trick door in your Montecito mansion.

Good : On top of an abandoned building inside a vent a few miles away from your Montecito mansion.

Example Scenario

You plan to do graffiti on a building the night before a Zionist fundraiser is hosted there. A month beforehand you scout a path from a dropoff location that is 10 minutes by bicycle to the target, and a pickup location that is a 10 minute bicycle ride away from the target. You ensure that the path to the dropoff and pickup locations have no Flock cameras, and the bicycle paths have no surveillance cameras along them, including Ring cameras. You find a spot that is a 10 minute walk away from the target that also has no cameras nearby and is in the woods (or some other location where there are unlikely to be witnesses). This spot has some bushes nearby where a box of spray paint cans can be buried, along with a change of clothes (navy-blue-adjacent colors that are difficult to spot at night). On the exfiltration route, you find a similar spot for disposing your stuff that is about 10 minutes away by bicycle. Here you plan to debloc, throw your navy blue clothes and empty spray paint cans into a trash bag, then throw the trash bag into a dumpster that regularly gets picked up. If you can find separate dumpsters for the cans and clothes that's even better, to keep them from being associated. You ensure that there's no cameras along this route or at the debloc/disposal spot.

To be extra cautious in case of a house raid after the event, you bury all your zines in a sealed plastic container a few miles from your house in the woods under a floorboard in an abandoned shack that you know nobody visits. You give your electronics to a trustworthy friend who lives reasonably far away by car and has no formal connection with you. You only retrieve the electronics after you're pretty sure there's no leads, and even then, whenever you're not using them they're turned off, encrypted, and cleaned of anything incriminating.

You might find the example scenario to be annoying, frustrating, and a pain in the ass. But ask yourself, would you rather deal with a little bit of annoyance and frustration now, or years of your life in the agony of jail, court proceedings, and prison? It's up to you to put in the effort to get your life together, clean up the zines, and move the [redacted] to a safe location.

Keep your stashes safe, and your weapons active.

Checklist

Goals

- Can you access and use your stuff when needed?
- Is law enforcement unable to find your stash spot?
- If law enforcement finds your stash spot, would they be unable to trace the stuff to you?

Principles

- Is your stash spot far away from your normal places of living, working and transportation?
- Is your stash spot effectively concealed?
- Are there no traces of DNA, fingerprints, surveillance camera footage, or other identifying information in or near your stash?

Tips

- Is the stash spot within bicycling or walking distance of where it will be used?
- Is the stash protected from the elements?
- Is the stash spot impossible to discover without prior knowledge?
- Is the stash spot close to where you live, work, or typically have activities?
- Does the stash spot have anything identifying in or around it?
- Does the stash spot have at least one mile of no surveillance on the path to it and the path away from it? = Will the stash spot stay concealed when the seasons change?

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