Before you buy used

How to check if something is stolen: official lookup tools. Work down the list in order and tick each step as you finish it. The full guide, with the reasons behind every step, is at confirmedstolen.com/check-if-stolen/.

Before you meet the seller

- [ ] **Ask for the serial number, VIN or IMEI before you agree to meet**
  A legitimate seller can usually provide it. Reluctance to share an identifier is a warning sign in itself.
- [ ] **Run the identifier through the matching lookup tool**
  Use the tools listed on this page for the item type. For a vehicle, try both NICB VINCheck (www.nicb.org/vincheck) and any state tool that covers where the vehicle has been.
- [ ] **Compare the price with typical used prices**
  A price far below what similar items sell for is one of the most common signs of stolen goods.
- [ ] **Ask for proof of purchase, a title or registration**
  Receipts, original packaging with a matching serial number, or a title in the seller's name all support a legitimate sale.

At the meeting

- [ ] **Meet in a public place, such as a police station exchange zone**
  Some police departments offer marked areas for marketplace sales. A seller who refuses to meet anywhere public is a reason to walk away.
- [ ] **Check that serial plates and labels are intact and match**
  Ground-off, scratched or mismatched serial numbers, VIN plates or stickers are strong indicators that something is wrong.
- [ ] **Confirm the name on the title matches the seller's ID**
  For vehicles, boats and trailers, the person selling should be the person named on the title, or able to explain clearly why not.
- [ ] **Make sure phones and laptops are signed out and unlocked**
  A device still tied to someone else's account or activation lock may be stolen, and it may be unusable to you either way.
- [ ] **Get a written bill of sale with the seller's contact details**
  Include the date, price, item description, serial number and the seller's name and phone number.

After you buy

- [ ] **Register the item in your name where a registry exists**
  Transfer the title, register a bicycle on Bike Index (bikeindex.org/), and record the serial number in your own inventory.

- [ ] **If a lookup later flags the item, contact the reporting agency**
  Do not confront the seller. Give police the bill of sale, listing screenshots and payment records.

Your case record

Item and serial, VIN or IMEI

Lookup tools checked (date)

Seller name and contact

Proof of ownership seen

Notes

Version November 6, 2026. General information, not legal advice. Agencies change their procedures, so confirm each step with the organization named. Confirmed Stolen is an independent reference; it is not law enforcement and does not recover property. Free to print and share with attribution.