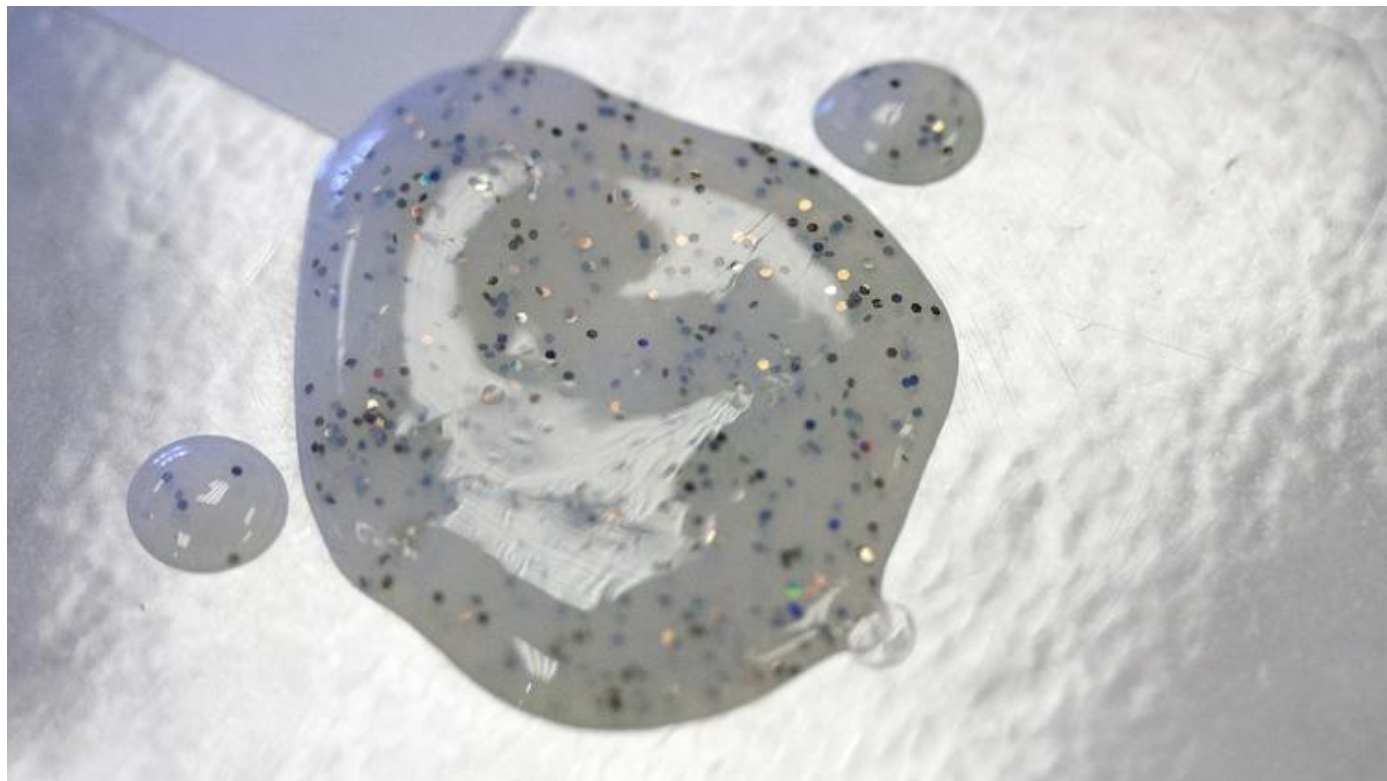


York-Poquoson sheriff has new way to track stolen items: tiny dots



The York-Poquoson Sheriff's Office has a new tool for matching stolen property to owners. ProtechDNA created clear adhesive containing thousands of microscopic dots that have a unique personal identification number etched into each dot. Users can place adhesive on to personal property items so if they were to be stolen, law enforcement could identify the true owners of recovered property by looking at the unique PIN. (Sarah Holm/ Staff)

By **Matt Jones**
Staff writer

APRIL 2, 2019, 4:00 PM

The York-Poquoson Sheriff's Office has a new tool to recover stolen items, and it comes in a small foil package a little bit larger than a ketchup packet.

It's a special kind of adhesive from property protection company ProtechDNA. The clear mixture contained inside the packet contains about 4,000 metal dots smaller than grains of sand, each chemically etched with a unique code linked to the owner of an object.

When an item is lost or stolen, deputies that recover it can use a UV light to find the clear smear of glue that contains the dots. With magnifying devices provided by ProtechDNA, they can then read the PINs on the dots and find the object's proper owner.

“Our property room is full of unclaimed property because we cannot determine who the owners are, and this will certainly be something that will help get our property back,” said sheriff Danny Diggs.

The sheriff’s office kicked off the program at a news conference Tuesday. It’s the first agency in Virginia to adopt the program, which president Shawn Andreas said has been adopted by over 5,000 law enforcement agencies throughout the country.

The tech, including the attachments for officer’s cellphones that allow them to read PINs, is all free, paid by insurance companies. Locally, Farmers Insurance agent Paul Clegg is sponsoring the program.

The insurer’s money also subsidizes the kits that citizens can order online, which contain several packets of the adhesive, stickers with dot-filled adhesive and a small pen that has a UV light and filled with adhesive instead of ink. One package contains enough adhesive for about 75 simultaneous applications, using a small swab that comes with the kit.

The first kit costs users \$5.99 in shipping and processing. The second kit, after the insurance rebate, is \$13.

Andreas, who owns the company alongside his wife Trina Andreas, said that the adhesive works on many objects: firearms, jewelry, phones, bikes and computers. The dots and adhesive can withstand high heat, so it can be used on boat engines and car parts.

On some items that are washed or cleaned often, like guns and jewelry, Andreas recommends re-applying the adhesive regularly. But even if a thief were to take the time to sand off the adhesive, police only need to find one dot to identify the owner.

“What we’ve got to look at is criminals are opportunistic,” Andreas said. “They look for the easiest way to steal something with the least amount of risk to get caught.”

The program also includes an app and online database, where users can input detailed information about their belongings such as serial numbers and descriptions. That information is linked to PINs and can be sent to law enforcement as well.

For Clegg’s business, that list is one of the most important parts. The list of belongings and values also can be given to insurers, according to Clegg, making resolving claims easier and faster.

“I think what’s going to make the immediate impact is the list and the organization, because that’s something people often don’t do,” Clegg said.

Recently, ProtechDNA started partnering with a company that allows it to cross-reference that data with pawn shop sales, Andreas said.

And the program is growing. Andreas estimated that hundreds of agencies are trying to sign up each month, encouraged by the subsidies from insurance companies. Hundreds of York County residents had signed up for

the program by going to protechDNA.com and creating a free account in the days before the sheriff's office held the news conference.

"I think that it's important that we introduce it with the right partner, and I don't think we could have a better a partner as far as outreach to the community," Andreas said.

Matt Jones, 757-247-4729, mjones@dailypress.com, [@jones_mattryan](https://twitter.com/jones_mattryan)

Copyright © 2019, Daily Press

This article is related to: [Theft](#)