

NIBRS Coding Scenarios

Property Description “19 - Merchandise”

Issue #1: Employees at a music store reported that an individual shoplifted a guitar. What would be the data value for this incident?

Coding: Agencies should use data value “19 Merchandise” when merchandise is the **most specific description** for the property involved in the incident. Often, agencies incorrectly use “77 - Other” instead of the more appropriate “19 - Merchandise”. In NIBRS, no specific data value exists for guitar or musical instrument. Because the guitar is an item held for sale, “19 - Merchandise” is the most specific descriptor. In reporting this offense, agencies should use data value “19 - Merchandise” not “77 - Other”.

Issue #2: An auto parts store employees reported that someone took a set of windshield wipers.

Coding: Even though the windshield wipers are merchandise or “items held for sale,” “38 - Vehicle Parts/Accessories” should be used as it is the most specific descriptor.

Issue #3: A musician told police that three guitars were taken from his apartment.

Coding: In this case, the reporting agency should use data value “77 - Other” because it is “all other property not fitting the above descriptions”.

Reference: *NIBRS Volume 1: Data Collection Guidelines (blue cover)*, explains Data Element 15 (property description), which includes data value “19 - Merchandise” (items for sale), pp. 83-84. For a definition of “merchandise”, the UCR Program uses *Black’s Law Dictionary*, sixth edition, which defines merchandise as:

“All goods which merchants usually buy and sell, whether at wholesale or retail; wares and commodities such as are ordinarily the objects of trade and commerce. But the term is generally not understood as including real estate, and is rarely applied to provisions such as are purchased day by day for immediate consumption (e.g., food), pp. 986-987.”

Note that the preceding gives general examples. It is not meant to be all inclusive. Coding is based on individual case circumstances. Please direct NIBRS questions to:



Brenda Manning
Criminal Statistical Analysis Center
 605-773-6312 or brenda.manning@state.sd.us