

WHAT IS SEATTLE POLICE DOING TO COMBAT AUTO THEFT?

It's a horrible shock - walking to your car and finding your window broken out and your car rifled through. Or worse - returning to the place you know you parked your car to find only an empty parking space.

If this has happened to you, you are not alone; statistics show that you are most likely to be a victim of a vehicle-related crime than any other crime reported to the Seattle Police Department.

When an auto theft report is taken, it is sent to the Auto Theft Unit, for further investigation and follow-up. The information on your stolen car is also entered into our system. Patrol officers will be alerted if they run a license plate number and it is listed as stolen.

PROACTIVE EFFORTS:

In addition to responding to Auto Thefts that have already occurred, Seattle Police are also trying proactive new techniques that take an overall view of the issue of auto theft:

THE MAJOR CRIMES TASK FORCE (MCTF), established in 2003, focuses specifically on prolific car thieves. Just a small number of car thieves steal the large majority of cars, so by developing a "Top Ten" list of car thieves, it allows investigators to review a suspect's past arrests and develop new leads to build a case strong enough to prosecute and get stronger sentences to get these criminals off the street for a substantial amount of time. This approach has worked very well, and it appears that many criminals who had found Seattle a good place to steal cars, are leaving the area.

STRONGER LEGISLATION: One of the most frustrating aspects of auto theft is that these offenses often carry relatively light sentences for criminals. This creates a cycle of crime; with criminals knowing what they can get away with, law enforcement arresting the same offenders again and again, and all the while more community members become victims of auto theft. That is why the Seattle Police Department has been working with its regional partners to advocate for changing the current legislation that regulates this crime. We have also begun a pilot program with the Seattle City Attorney's Office where they will prosecute individuals who are declined from Superior Court on misdemeanor charges, to seek the longest sentence possible under that system, one year. The MCTF has also helped by building stronger cases that would result in a sentence of at least 24 months if a conviction is given.

BAIT CAR PROGRAM: The Bait Car is a specially equipped automobile that can be placed in areas where auto thefts are high. If a thief attempts to steal the bait car, an alarm is activated and a detective is notified.

PUBLIC EDUCATION: An informed and vigilant public has the greatest impact on auto theft. Auto Thefts and Car Prowls are typically crimes of opportunity. By following the Crime Prevention Techniques outlined in this brochure, those opportunities are greatly reduced, thus reducing the overall occurrence rate. Locking your car, taking all of your valuables when you leave your car, parking in well-lit, high traffic areas, and using prevention devices and visual deterrents all reduce the risk that you will be a victim of this crime.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

IF YOUR CAR IS STOLEN OR VANDALIZED:

- Call **9-1-1** if it happened recently and the suspect may still be in the area. If there is any doubt regarding when the incident occurred or what the circumstances are, please don't hesitate to call 9-1-1.
- If you discovered your car was missing or vandalized after a significant amount of time has passed, call the police non-emergency number at **(206) 625-5011**.
- Your insurance company *may* require you to provide them with a copy of the police incident report. You may make a request for this in person at Seattle Police Headquarters Public Request Unit (**M-F 8:00-4:30 p.m.**) or by mail.

More about police records can be found at:
www.seattle.gov/police/contact/records.htm

IF YOUR STOLEN CAR IS RECOVERED:

Prior to using it, always carefully examine your recovered stolen vehicle:

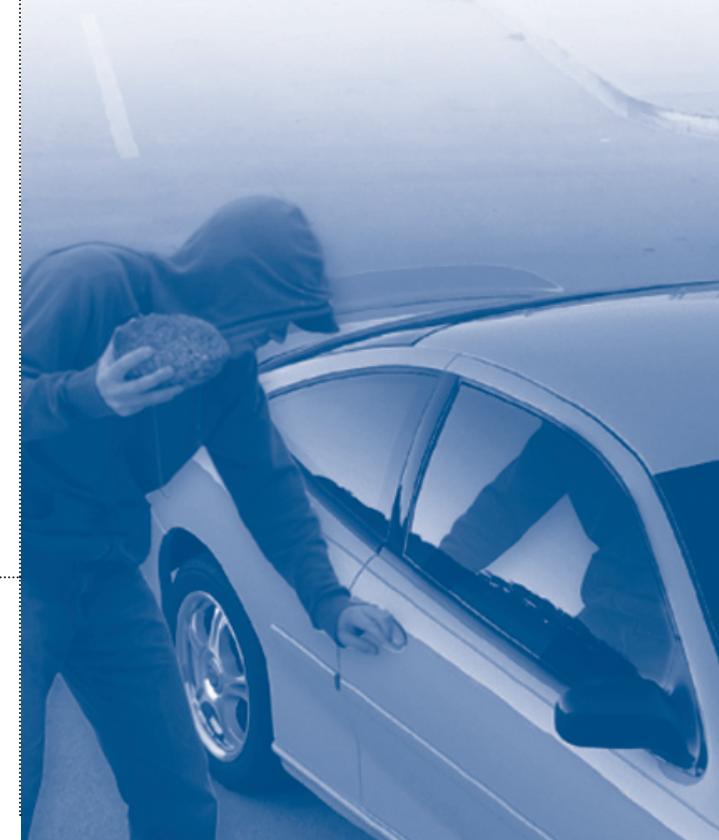
- Look for property that does not belong to you that may be evidence of other crimes.
- Search the interior of your vehicle carefully, using a flashlight, to make sure drugs, drug paraphernalia, or dangerous objects such as syringes have not been left behind. Be very careful not to touch them. Call the police to come remove any contraband you find.

To turn over any evidence or contraband to the police, call the Non-Emergency number, **(206) 625-5011**, and be sure to have your Seattle Police Incident Number handy to give to the Operator.



VEHICLE SECURITY

How to Protect Your Car from Crime



PRODUCED BY THE SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SEATTLE NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP



VERSION 1/2009

CARPROWLS

“Car prowl” is not an official legal term, but it refers to theft from a vehicle and/or property damage that occurs while trying to gain access to a vehicle.

- **Never leave anything of value in your car!**
- When you exit or enter your parked vehicle, stop and take a look around the area.
- After parking your car, always remove the keys, roll up the windows and lock the doors.
- When parking in a garage, make a habit of locking your garage door and car doors.
- If your car is stored in a carport or parked near your house, install motion sensor to turn lights on or leave on throughout the night.
- If you park on the street, choose a well-lit, open space.

CARJACKING

Carjacking is the most frightening and dangerous type of vehicle theft. It is a robbery during which a criminal uses force, or the threat of force, to take a vehicle from a person possessing it.

Your car is not worth your life! If someone tries to take your vehicle by threatening you with harm, surrender the vehicle. Just focus on your own safety, and on being a good witness to assist police with the investigation.

- When approaching your car, have your key in your hand, and check the back seat before you get in.
- If someone is loitering near your un-occupied car as you approach it, keep walking until the person leaves.
- Be wary of people asking for directions or handing out flyers. Trust your instincts.

SOME BASIC FACTS ABOUT VEHICLE CRIME

Car theft happens fast. An experienced car thief can gain access to your car in under a minute. Many car thefts and car prowls are crimes of “opportunity”.

Thankfully, there is some encouraging news; vehicle thefts have been declining in Seattle – in 2007 they were at the lowest rate since 1988. Also, approximately 86% of stolen vehicles are recovered.

WHAT ATTRACTS A CAR THIEF?

In a word, “opportunity”. Don’t make it easy for a car thief by:

- Leaving your car unlocked or the windows down.
- Leaving your keys in the car or a spare key hidden in the car.
- Leaving your car running and unattended.
- Parking in poorly lit places with low visibility. More than two thirds of all auto thefts occur at night.
- Leaving valuables in plain view.

WHO STEALS CARS?

- People who steal cars are often involved in a number of other crimes, including fraud, forgery or thefts.
- A small group of car thieves are often responsible for the majority of auto thefts.
- There is a strong correlation between drug users (especially methamphetamine) and car theft.

WHY ARE CARS STOLEN?

- **COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS:** This includes theft rings and “chop shop” operations.
- **PARTS:** Cars are often stolen for their parts. Items such as airbags, have become a highly valuable commodity.
- **FOR USE IN OTHER CRIME:** Cars are sometimes stolen to use in other crimes such as robberies, burglaries and drug activities.
- **JUVENILE JOYRIDES:** Juveniles usually steal cars to gain status, or just for “thrills”. Juveniles often do not go to jail for auto theft.
- **TRANSPORTATION:** Unbelievably, one of the most common reasons cars are stolen is for use as temporary transportation. Many car thieves just jump from car to car and then leave them abandoned. The good news is these cars are easy to recover and usually have very little damage.

PREVENTION DEVICES

STEERING WHEEL LOCKS: This is a long metal bar that locks onto your steering wheel, making it impossible to move. There are a number of different manufacturers. They can be purchased relatively cheaply and are also available through the **Seattle Neighborhood Group**.

VIN ETCHING: This is a process where the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is chemically etched onto the window and other parts of your car. It is a very effective tool if the car is being taken for parts and it also aids in recovery of stolen vehicles.

TIRE/WHEEL OR STEERING COLUMN LOCKS: Much like the Steering Wheel Locks, these all make the car inoperable until the device is removed. Using these devices will discourage or at least slow down most would-be thieves.

KILL SWITCHES: This is a hidden switch that must be flipped for the car to start. The Kill Switch prevents the flow of electricity or fuel to the engine until it is activated. While it is inexpensive and relatively easy to install, the trick is hiding it well. Check your vehicle warranty before installing a kill switch.

ALARMS: There are a variety of alarms on the market that run the gamut from basic noisemakers to elaborate security systems. Consider the investment you have made in your vehicle when deciding which alarm to install. One of the biggest downfalls of alarms is that they have become common background noise which rarely results in a call to 9-1-1.

ELECTRONIC TRACKING DEVICES: This is the newest tool in auto security. While it does not provide a visual deterrent to stop a car thief, it does make it much easier to locate the vehicle.