



DON'T BE A VICTIM OF AUTO THEFT

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According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, a motor vehicle is stolen in the U.S. every 26.4 seconds. Not only does auto theft cost the victim time and money; it also costs society because it drives insurance premiums up and many times stolen vehicles are used to commit other crimes.

Det. Jason Gibson is an Eastpointe Police Officer working with the Macomb Auto Theft Squad to investigate and deter stolen autos within the city of Eastpointe. According to Det. Gibson, there has been a drastic increase in stolen vehicles in the past couple of months which he attributes to what he calls "warm-ups," which are cars started and left running unattended. In December alone, Det. Gibson reports 29 motor vehicle thefts (averaging almost one per day). So far in the month of January, we have already had 12 motor vehicle thefts with half of them being stolen as the result of "warm-ups." There is no doubt that a few of these may be crimes of opportunity, but make no mistake, thieves are out and about looking for easy targets. Statistics show that the average peak time for motor vehicle theft is 7:00 am; when residents are warming up their cars for work.

Take a proactive approach to deterring vehicle theft. Be alert and observant in your neighborhoods to suspicious activities. Remember, only residents know their neighborhoods and what is considered unusual or "out of place." Call the police if you notice suspicious people or vehicles, footprints in the snow around your vehicle, parked and occupied vehicles, etc.

While there is nothing 100% guaranteed to thwart or dissuade your car from being stolen, taking preventative measures can minimize your chances of becoming the victim of auto theft. Listed below are some tips to deter theft:

COMMON SENSE IS YOUR BEST DEFENSE

Lock it up. Lock your vehicle, close all windows/sun roof, and take your keys.

Hide valuables. Don't leave valuables in plain view. Items left in the open attract thieves.

Beware of identity fraud. Don't leave important documents such as bank statements, credit card bills or other personal information in your vehicle. Thieves can use this information to steal your identity and access your bank and credit card accounts.

Take your registration. Never leave the registration or title in your car. If stolen; this makes it easier for the thief to dispose of your vehicle.

Parking strategy. Park in well lit areas with plenty of pedestrian traffic or attended lots.

Turn your car off. Never leave your vehicle running unattended-even for a minute. Vehicles are commonly stolen from ATM's, driveways, convenience stores, etc.

*R 28.1458 Rule 458 of the Michigan Uniform Traffic Code states that (1) A person who has control or charge of a motor vehicle shall not allow the vehicle to stand unattended on any street or any other place without first stopping the engine, locking the ignition and removing and taking possession of the ignition key. (2) A person who violates this rule is responsible for a civil infraction.

Use your garage. If you have a garage, use it. Lock the garage as well as your vehicle and close the windows.

Disable your vehicle. If you are leaving your vehicle unattended for an extended period of time, remove the electronic ignition fuse, coil wire, distributor, or otherwise disable your vehicle.

Age doesn't matter. Don't become complacent because you drive an older vehicle. Parts from older vehicles are in great demand because quantity is scarce. Det. Gibson states that mid 90's Pontiacs and early 90's GM products are particularly at risk and are still being stolen at a high rate.

Use your alarm. If your vehicle has an alarm or other anti-theft device, use it.



INVESTING IN VEHICLE PROTECTION

Window etching. Stolen vehicles are more easily traced when Vehicle Identification Numbers (VIN) have been etched on each of the windows. It also makes your vehicle less attractive to a professional car thief. Many insurance companies and other agencies offer free VIN etching at certain locations. Check with your insurance company to see what they offer.

Use of locks. Visible steering wheel locks such as "The Club" prevent the steering wheel from being turned. Det. Gibson advises that this is a low cost, very effective anti-theft device since most thieves want to be "in and out" and will not take the time to try and disable the device. Floorboard locks prevent the use of the gas/brake pedal, gearshift locks disable shifting of the transmission and tire locks prevent the vehicle from moving.

Armored collars. Armored collars around the steering column deter thieves from breaking into the steering column to get to the ignition wires.

Kill switches. Ignition kill switches halt the fuel supply. Similar to this automatic start systems will shut the vehicle off if the brake is touched without the key being inserted (you must press on the brake to put the car in gear).

Audio Alarm. Audio alarms emit loud warning sounds when the doors, hood or trunk are opened or the car is otherwise tampered with.

Vehicle tracking. Vehicle tracking systems which are installed in your vehicle are activated when your vehicle is stolen. These systems alert the police to the location of your vehicle for quick recovery.

CARJACKING-a crime where a vehicle is taken from a person either by force or threat of force. It is a violent vehicle theft and should be immediately reported to the police.

Be alert. As you approach your vehicle be alert, have a plan of action and have your keys in your hands. Check around, under and in your vehicle for suspicious individuals. Immediately leave the scene if you have any suspicions.

Don't be a hero. If confronted, avoid verbal-physical confrontation-do exactly as you are told. If at all possible, never leave in the car with the carjacker.

Your valuables. Remember, you are more important than your vehicle, purse, wallet or any other valuable. Give them up and get out of harm's way.

Call the police. Once the thief leaves, immediately contact law enforcement. Be ready to provide a complete description of your vehicle, license plate and the suspects.

Lock to be safe. Once in your vehicle, lock your doors and keep the windows up while driving.

Leave room. Leave room to maneuver around other vehicles when coming to a stop and be wary of people asking for direction or handing out flyers.

Rear impact. If bumped from behind and it seems suspicious, call the police from your car or move at a slow speed to a well lit, well populated area and immediately call the police.

Sources: www.auto-theft.info/statistics, www.crime.about.com, www.watchyourcar.org