

Auto Theft

A Major Problem in the Seattle Area and Across Washington State

Jim Bryant, State Farm

The Problem:

- Washington's auto theft rate jumped 60% from 1990 to 2000. From 2000 to 2005 it went up 32%.
- During 2005, an average of almost 137 cars were stolen each day in Washington, up from 93 per day in 2000.
- The Seattle/Tacoma/Bellevue area has the 6th highest auto theft rate in the country at 1,056 thefts per 100,000 people.

This despite the fact that, until recently, auto theft had been declining nationally and in California.

Why is auto theft increasing in Washington faster than it is nationally?

- Washington has numerous ports to export stolen cars.
- Many car thieves are juveniles, who face light sentences here.
- Relatively high per capita income means more high value cars to steal.

Another Problem:

The Percentage of Stolen Vehicles That Are Recovered Is Down.

- Recovery rate was around 95% in the late seventies.
- Today it is around 88%.

Why Are Fewer Cars Being Recovered?

- More are being illegally exported overseas.
- More are being re-licensed with false identification.

So What Are the Most Popular Cars to Steal?

The Top Ten List:

- Honda Accord
- Honda Civic
- Toyota Camry
- Dodge Caravan
- Nissan Sentra
- Ford F150 PU
- Acura Integra
- Toyota PU
- Saturn SL
- Dodge Ram PU

So Where Are They Going?

Stolen cars are going to...

- Chop shops -- Criminal operations posing as auto repair facilities that actually steal vehicles or accept owner give-ups, disassembling them for valuable parts, which are sold to repair facilities.
- Overseas in Containers...
It's Profitable:
 - Vehicles won't be listed as stolen in foreign countries.
 - No import/export tariffs paid.
 - Vehicles sometimes worth 2-3 times retail on foreign black markets.
 - Tell your insurance company the car's been stolen.

Joy Rides

Generally young people looking for transportation and thrills.

Midnight Auto Supply -- Parts

- It's not just Chop Shops that need parts.
- Individuals steal cars for parts they need.
- Import "Street Racers" steal cars for tires/wheels, seats, aftermarket racing parts, and fast engines.

Street Racing

Stolen Cars are Used to Commit Other Crimes:

- Mail Theft
- Drug trafficking
- Burglary
- Drive-by shootings
- Other crimes

Creating a New Identity

Salvage switch

- VIN plate from a salvaged vehicle is switched to a stolen vehicle making the stolen vehicle appear to be a legitimate vehicle.
- Cloned cars: Other VIN plates copied from a car in another state/country are put on the stolen car to create an apparently legitimate car.

Fraud

Owner Give-ups

- Owner gets rid of the vehicle and submits a false theft report hoping the insurer will pay for the car.
- Car has major mechanical problems.
- Owner can't afford the payments.
- Owner wants to 'upgrade' parts – vehicle 'stolen' and recovered with those parts missing.

Auto Theft Key Facts

Please read this sentence...

“In less time than it takes you to read this sentence an accomplished auto thief could be in your locked car and starting it up.”

- Auto theft occurs every 20 seconds.
- Auto Theft claims nationwide now exceed ONE BILLION DOLLARS YEARLY.
- In Washington, each theft averages \$5,500, which pays for a replacement, or new parts and repairs.
- Although 88% of stolen cars are recovered, 4/5 of those are either damaged or have missing parts.

Prevention Tips

Use a layered approach. The more layers of protection on your vehicle, the more difficult it is to steal.

Layer 1: Common Sense

- Lock your doors.
- Remove your keys from the ignition.
- Close your windows completely.
- Park in well-lit areas.

Layer 2: Visible or Audible Device

- Audible alarm system
- Steering wheel locks
- Steering column collars
- Theft deterrent decals
- Tire locks
- Window etching

Layer 3: Vehicle Immobilizer

- Smart keys with computer chips that must be present to start the vehicle
- Fuse cut-offs
- Kill switches
- Start, ignition, and fuel disablers

Layer 4: Tracking System

- Tracking system that emits a signal to police or monitoring service when the vehicle is reported stolen.
- Auto theft is covered if you have Comprehensive Coverage on your automobile policy.

What You Can Do to Help Stop Auto Theft

- If you see suspicious activity, call 911
- If you think someone is committing Insurance Fraud by falsely reporting his or her car stolen – call the National Insurance Crime Bureau at 800-TEL-NICB

Additional Resources:

- National Insurance Crime Bureau
- Puget Sound Special Investigators
- NW Insurance Council
- Coalition Against Insurance Fraud

Questions & Answers