

Car Crime
An Information Bulletin for the Parking Authority of Toronto
by Intelligarde International Inc.

The Problem: There is now an epidemic of car related crime in most major North American cities. Car crime has attracted a broad range of criminals because of the possibility of quick gain and nominal penalties.

Car Break-ins

What do the thieves want?

Cash, including visible 'meter money' billfolds, credit cards, compact discs, stereo tapes, keys, remote door openers, cellular phones, pagers, photographic and electronic equipment, expensive sound systems, expensive clothing, sunglasses, brief cases, suit-cases. Cash is preferable but anything that can quickly be turned into cash has almost equal appeal.

Who are the thieves?

Independent criminals acting alone or pairs, youth gang members, users of hard drugs, vagrants. Many thieves who steal from parked cars are young men (14-22) who are looking for meter money to use directly and other items to turn into quick cash.

What are their methods?

In the majority of cases this is a no skill, no brain crime. Usually a rear or vent window is broken using a spark plug, screw driver or tire iron. A thin flexible piece of steel called a 'Slim Jim' may also be used to unlatch the door. Sometimes a thief wanting to leave no mess - perhaps in order to accomplish multiple break-ins in a short time period, will drill out the lock on the driver's door. Whatever method, the process takes less than 60 Seconds.

What cars do they target?

Eighty percent of cars broken into are displaying visible valuables. Cars with out of province license plates or parked outside hospitals or motels are also targets because thieves know items not trusted to hospital/hotel rooms are locked in glove compartments or trunks of cars.

How can you protect against this type of theft?

Remove all visible valuables from sight. Remember, thieves often go window shopping before they break into a vehicle. While car alarms tend to be dismissed as a nuisance by the general public, a visible functioning car alarm is better than nothing to attract attention, particularly in attended or patrolled parking lots.

Access to parking areas is the first line of defense. The tighter the access control to the parking lot the more difficult it will be for a thief to 'cruise' a parking area and 'shop' the vehicles unnoticed. Choose bright, clean, busy, attended parking areas with no derelict vehicles. Avoid lots where rubbish and dirt in the stairwells shows evidence of loitering. Be aware of individuals "shopping" vehicles in the lot i.e. looking in windows, trying doors and acting suspiciously. Such individuals are probably carrying a bag to hide stolen goods and burglary tools. They may have a vehicle parked nearby or be working on foot. Be aware of one or more persons working as a team to 'shop' vehicles and to act as a lookout for each other as they do break-ins.

Advise the lot attend- ant, security or the police of any suspicious activity you see in parking lots. In residential buildings over- head doors should allow only one vehicle entry at a time. Similarly, double entry through the resident

pedestrian doors should be discouraged. Signs advising the lot is private property and trespassing is prohibited should be posted. All persons found loitering in parking areas should be banned under the trespass to Property Act and a photograph taken as part of the documentation.

Those entering the premises when previously banned should be arrested by security or police and processed. Security patrols of the parking areas should note any vehicles insecure or displaying visible valuables. This is crime prevention education and is a lot more effective and cost conscious than detection and apprehension.

Car Theft

What do the thieves want? Cars are stolen a variety of reasons including, not limited to: youth gang initiation and 'joy riding', for use in the commission of a subsequent crime, to be stripped for parts or recombined with another stolen vehicle in a 'chop shop', to fulfill a 'custom' order by an unknown purchaser, to be shipped and resold out of town, province or country. Late model high quality vehicles are more attractive to all the markets mentioned above. By far the most frequent use for a stolen car is "joy riding", gained through easy opportunity, that is, keys left in the ignition and the engine running.

Who are the thieves?

They range from youth gang members in their early teens on up to seasoned professionals in early middle age. They tend to be young, male and feel the need to drive a car. They often show off to friends by offering them a ride in the stolen vehicle, usually without telling them it is stolen.

What are their methods?

Most thieves look for cars left unattended with keys in the ignition. In a very small number of cases the thief may tow the vehicle away. If keys are not present the thief opens the vehicle by using a 'Slim Jim' down the window glass of the driver's door, drills out the lock, or breaks a window. Once inside, the ignition lock is punched out and the wires crossed to "hot wire" or activate the ignition. Depending on the method used and the skill of the thief, the process generally takes from 30 seconds to three minutes.

What cars do they target?

The favorite cars to target may change from city to city or even by area of the city. In Toronto popular vehicles appear to be Chrysler vans and wagons, Nissan Maximas and a variety of Hondas. The cars easiest to steal go first. It is as simple as that. This means unattended cars with the keys in the ignition and the engine running.

How can you protect against this type of theft?

There are electronic disabling products on the market that make a car virtually impossible to steal unless the key is in the vehicle with the ignition on, or, if the thief tows the Vehicle away. Cheaper than electronic kill systems are car alarms. Alarms may scare off a less than determined thief and may alert security or neighbors to a problem. Additionally, visible extra mechanical steering wheel locks offer some deterrence even though they can be sawed through. No anti-theft system is 100% guaranteed, but each increasing level of security added to your vehicle and its environment makes it more likely that the thief will pick an easier et in a more congenial environment.

This is a client service bulletin for the Parking Authority of Toronto by Intelligarde International

For further information, security audits, recommendations, seminars or services call (416) 760-0000 or 1-800-387-0000

Safety In Numbers. 43 Things You Never Knew About Parking Safety.

1. An empty cigarette lighter receptacle tells a car thief you might have a cell phone. Keep the cigarette lighter in its receptacle.
2. Your cell phone is actually worth more stolen on the black market than it is new. Hide it and all accessories.
3. Always leave your car locked with all windows tightly closed.
4. If a stranger enters your car, exit the car immediately with the keys.
5. A car alarm and/or mechanical steering wheel lock certainly is a deterrent. Consider one, the other, or both.
6. Go the extra mile and use a car alarm with the ignition kill feature.
7. Never leave registration and insurance certificates in vehicle. It's instant, useful information for thieves.
8. Thieves often don't have time to check everything out. Stash the cash and credit cards in the trunk.
9. Don't leave any mail or ID in the car. It's an open invitation for the criminal element to visit your home.
10. Take your parking ticket stub with you. This makes it difficult for a thief to get out of a Green P attended facility.
11. Never leave keys in ignition even just for a minute.
12. Note pedestrian exits, and select your walking route before exiting car.
13. Note where security buttons and fire alarm pulls are.
14. If threatened, pull the fire alarm - firemen often arrive faster than police and will come directly to the station pulled.
15. If threatened or attacked, scream as you run, and push/rock cars to activate as many car alarms as possible.
16. Patronize parking lots that provide security. Look for the official security patrol signs at Green P locations.
17. Don't park beside vans or larger vehicles where sightlines can be obstructed.
18. Where possible, back into a parking spot for better exposure and getaways.
19. Always be aware of people within 30 metres of your vehicle. Personal attacks occur most often when entering or exiting your vehicle.
20. If attacked, resist being put into a vehicle or otherwise taken away from the original site of the attack.

21. Keep 4 metres away from suspicious persons - abruptly change direction of travel to determine if you are being targeted.
22. If applicable, pretend to be talking to someone on a cell phone - clearly telling them your current position.
23. Anything visible in your car is thief bait. Put all your belongings out of sight.
24. If pursued, throw your keys in one direction, and run screaming in the other.
25. If your purse or wallet is demanded, throw it in one direction and run screaming in the other.
26. Always keep a spare set of keys on you.
27. As you approach your vehicle, be aware of any suspicious people, broken glass or doors ajar.
28. Patronize clean, well lit parking lots.
29. Try to park as close to an attendant or the main entry/exit as possible.
30. Walk in well lit areas in the middle of the lot whenever possible.
31. Use only main entry/exit points. Avoid obscure fire exits.
32. If attacked, shouting "FIRE" can be very effective.
33. If you feel threatened by someone on an elevator, get off or don't get on.
34. Stand by the elevator buttons. Push all of them if threatened and get off where possible.
35. Report all suspicious (even seemingly minor) activities in parking lots to authorities.
36. If applicable, note license plates, make and colour of any suspicious vehicles - report it to authorities.
37. Always drive with doors locked. Keep purse, cash or wallets hidden.
38. Avoid cars with heavily tinted glass.
39. Cars with out-of-province plates and rental cars are thief bait.
40. Vehicle break-ins can take as little as 5 seconds without making a sound.
41. Methods of entry include:
 - Silent window break with sparkplug or metal punch.
 - Thin metal strap down glass of door window to release lock (slim Jim).
 - Lock drilled out.
42. Suspicious signs before a car crime: - Loitering in parking lot.
 - "Shopping" cars by looking in windows for visible valuables.

- Persons who work singly or in pairs carrying gym-type bags to collect stolen goods.

43. What thieves want from you. Everything from any visible valuables (even dirty laundry) to stereo systems to garage door openers for future entries. Heck, even air bags are stolen.