



VEHICLE SECURITY AND CRIME PREVENTION TIPS

SDPD Crime Prevention

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Although a professional vehicle thief can defeat most security measures and quickly break into and steal a locked vehicle, most vehicle break-ins and thefts are carried out by amateurs who take advantage of driver carelessness in leaving vehicles unlocked, valuables in sight, etc. The tips in this paper deal with measures for preventing most kinds of crimes involving vehicles. Additional tips on personal safety and security, home security, travel safety and security, preventing fraud and identity theft, etc. can be obtained on the Prevention Tips page of the SDPD website at www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/tips.

PREVENTING VEHICLE BREAK-INS

The following tips help prevent vehicle break-ins, which could lead to theft of the vehicle itself or of property items in it.

- Park in an open, well-lighted, and populated area near your destination, preferably one in view of a security camera. Avoid parking near trucks, vans, camper shells, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Also avoid parking near people loitering or sitting in vehicles.
- Never leave anything in plain sight, not even empty bags or boxes. Conceal all navigation aids, cellular phones, audio systems, sunglasses, etc. inside your vehicle. Put cameras, packages, sports equipment, firearms, hand tools, and other valuables in the trunk before you park, never after you park because thieves may be watching. And take anything you can't afford to lose with you, e.g., a wallet, purse, or laptop computer. Thieves usually don't break into vehicles unless they plan to steal what's visible inside.
- Park in lots or garages where you don't have to leave your keys. If you have to leave your vehicle keys, remove all home and other keys from you chain. Also, don't leave your garage door opener where it is easily accessible, and hide your vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any other papers with your home address on them where they are not likely to be found.
- Park in your garage at home, if you have one. Don't leave your vehicle on the street, in an alley, or on your driveway. If you have to park on a street, avoid dark or isolated areas.

- Turn off your engine, roll up all windows, lock all doors, and take your keys with you even if you are making a quick stop at a store or gas station. Also make sure the trunk and hood are locked.
- Don't leave your vehicle in an unattended public lot for an extended period time.
- Buy a vehicle with interior hood and trunk lock releases. Install a secondary hood lock if your vehicle does not have one.
- Replace knob-type door lock buttons with tapered ones.
- Install an alarm system that will sound when someone attempts to break in, move, tilt, or start your vehicle. Always activate the system when leaving the vehicle.
- Check your vehicle if you hear the alarm sound. But don't try to stop a person attempting to break in. Get a good description of the person and call the police.
- When you lock your vehicle with a Remote Keyless Entry (RKE) fob make sure that all the doors are locked before leaving your vehicle, especially in public parking lots. There has been an increased use of jammers to prevent the RKE signal from activating the door locks.

PREVENTING THEFTS OF PARKED VEHICLES

The following tips are in addition to the ones listed above for preventing vehicle break-ins.

- Conceal maps or travel brochures that might indicate you are a tourist.
- Turn your wheels sharply toward the curb when parking on a street.
- Use anti-theft devices that can be attached to the steering wheel or column, or brake pedal.
- Install fuel or power cut-off switches.
- Buy a vehicle with a locking ignition or steering column.
- Attach a tire lock or boot to the rim of one wheel.
- Don't hide a spare key on your vehicle.

PREVENTING THEFTS FROM VEHICLES

- Never leave anything of value in plain sight. Conceal all navigation aids, cellular phones, audio systems, sunglasses, etc. inside your vehicle.
- Take anything you can't afford to lose with you, e.g., a wallet, purse, or laptop computer. Put cameras, packages, sports equipment, firearms, hand tools, and other valuables in the trunk before you park, never after you park because thieves may be watching.
- When shopping, ask the store to hold all your purchases until you are finished there so you can carry everything to your vehicle in one trip. If you need to make more than one trip, put your purchases in the trunk and move your vehicle to a different area of the parking lot after each trip.
- Make sure that any valuables that were locked in the glove box or trunk were not taken or tampered with when you return to your vehicle. Thieves are able to get into some vehicles without leaving any visible signs of a break-in.
- Take the removable face of your CD player with you even if you are going to be gone for a few minutes.
- Lock truck-bed toolboxes.
- Install locking devices on batteries, wheels, audio equipment, spare tires, gas tanks, etc.
- Make several slices through your license plate registration sticker after it has been placed on the plate. If the sticker is stolen you can get a replacement from your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office.
- When pumping gas and no one else is in your vehicle, roll up all the windows, lock the doors, and take your keys with you so you don't lock yourself out of the vehicle. This will prevent someone from taking anything you may have left in the vehicle, e.g., a purse on the front seat, while you are not looking.

PREVENTING PERSONAL ATTACKS

- Avoid parking or walking near strangers loitering or sitting in vehicles. Check that no one is hiding around your vehicle before you get out or in.
- Have your key in hand so you can open the door immediately when you return to your vehicle.
- Ask a co-worker or security guard to escort you to your vehicle if your work late.

- Be especially alert when parking at fast food places, gas stations, ATMs, and shopping areas along suburban highways.

PREVENTING THEFTS OF MOTORCYCLES

- When at home, park and lock your bike in the garage, preferably behind a car. And make sure the garage is secure.
- When out, park in a well-lighted area in full view of people in the area and within the coverage of a security camera.
- Try to avoid parking between larger vehicles as they provide cover for thieves.
- Do not leave your helmet or riding gear with your bike.
- Lock your ignition and remove the key. Also lock your bike's forks or disc brakes with a large external lock.
- Cover your bike when you leave it unattended. Use a cover with grommets so the cover can be locked in place. And set the alarm to activate when the cover is removed. Few thieves will risk a blind theft. They usually look for certain models.
- Chain and lock your bike to a secure, immovable object when it's unattended. Use a high tensile-strength chain and a matching security lock. Loop the chain through the rear wheel or frame and make sure it is tight around your bike. Do not let it rest on the ground. And use multiple locks. A thief might be prepared for one but not the other.
- Lock bikes together when riding with others.
- Install a good audible alarm and a hidden kill switch.

PREVENTING THEFTS OF BICYCLES

- If you have to leave your bike outside, secure it to a rack in a busy public location. Avoid leaving it overnight.
- The best locks to use for securing bikes to racks are U-locks or chain locks. U-locks have a thick steel shackle that is attached to a crossbar with a keyed lock. Chain locks have tough links that are typically attached with a small disc lock that requires a key to open. Locks should secure the frame and both wheels. Secure all removable parts or take them with you.
- Never leave an expensive bike unattended outside. Any bicycle lock can be defeated.
- Never leave an expensive bike in a common storage area in a multi-unit residential building. Keep it in your unit.
- The best bicycle enclosures are made of metal and secured with shielded- or hidden-shackle padlocks. The former can be ordinary padlocks that are covered with a metal shield that prevents a person from cutting the shackle or the hasp with a bolt cutter. The shield would be open at the bottom for a key to be inserted to open the lock. The latter are padlocks with both shackle and hasp shielded.

PREVENTING VANDALISM

- Park in open, well-lighted, and populated areas near your destination. Avoid parking near trucks, vans, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Avoid parking near strangers loitering or sitting in vehicles.
- Park in your home garage, if you have one. Don't leave your vehicle on the street, in an alley, or on your driveway. If you have to park on a street, avoid dark or isolated areas.
- Don't leave your vehicle in an unattended public lot for an extended period time.

PREVENTING ROBBERS FROM TAKING YOUR VEHICLE

The above tips for preventing personal attacks will help prevent a robber from taking your vehicle when you are outside it. The following tips will help prevent a robber from taking your vehicle when you are driving it. But if you do get involved with a robber, don't resist or argue. Your life is much more valuable than your vehicle.

- Keep your doors locked and your windows closed.
- Know where you are going. Stop and get directions before you get lost.
- Avoid driving alone, especially at night and in dangerous areas.

- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- Keep a cell phone handy for use if you are threatened.
- Drive to the nearest open business and call **911** if a vehicle is following you. If there aren't any open businesses, call **911** from your vehicle and tell the dispatcher where you are. Don't go home.
- Keep your vehicle in gear when stopped for traffic signals or signs. Try to leave room to drive away if threatened. Be alert for anyone approaching your vehicle.
- Keep purses and other valuables out of view when driving alone. Put them on the floor or in the trunk.
- Honk your horn or flash your emergency lights to attract attention if you are threatened while in your vehicle.
- Stay in your vehicle if you stop to aid others. Find out what the problem is and offer to call and report the situation.
- Keep your vehicle in good mechanical condition so it won't break down and leave you stranded on the road. Also keep enough gas in the tank so you won't run out.
- If your vehicle breaks down or runs out of gas, pull over to the right as far as possible, raise the hood, and call or wait for help. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked until you can identify any person who comes to help.
- Be wary of minor rear-end collisions, especially at night on dark freeway off-ramps. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked if you are uneasy or suspicious. Drive to the nearest open business to check the damage and exchange insurance information.

REPORTING CRIMES INVOLVING VEHICLES

- Report all vehicles thefts, vehicle break-ins, and thefts of property from a vehicle ASAP even if the loss is small and you are not planning to file an insurance claim. These reports enable local law enforcement agencies to assess the magnitude and nature of these crime problems and assign prevention, patrol, and enforcement assets accordingly.
- Call **911** if the theft or break-in is in progress and provide the dispatcher with your location and a good description of the vehicle and the suspect. Signs of a possible bike theft include the following: (1) one or more people standing near a bike, (2) a bike being loaded into a van or truck, and (3) a bike being transported on its side.
- Call the non-emergency number of the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction in the area where the crime was committed if the crime is not in progress. In the City of San Diego the SDPD non-emergency numbers are **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. It's important to remain on the line to talk to a dispatcher and provide a good description of the vehicle and property involved.
- Describe stolen vehicles by year, make, model, color(s), Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), insurance company and policy number, license plate number and state, and name of any tracking and locator system installed in the vehicle.
- Describe stolen property by type, make, model, serial number, and fair market value. Stolen license plates can be replaced at your local DMV office.
- Describe stolen bicycles by type, serial number, and any personalization, i.e., stickers, markings, etc.
- If your vehicle is stolen in Mexico, report the theft to the local Mexican authorities and obtain a certified copy of the report. When you return home bring the report, your identification, and the vehicle title to a California Highway Patrol (CHP) office. After this, if you locate and recover your vehicle in Mexico, notify the U.S. Customs inspector when crossing the border. You will be sent to a secondary inspection area where a CHP or SDPD officer will examine the vehicle and check your identification. The officer will release the vehicle to the registered owner and remove it from the stolen-vehicle data base.

PREVENTING A THIEF OR ROBBER FROM SELLING YOUR VEHICLE

- Don't leave your driver license in the vehicle.
- Don't leave your vehicle title (pink slip) in the vehicle.

RECOVERING A STOLEN VEHICLE

- Install a tracking and location system that can be activated after the vehicle is reported as stolen.

IDENTIFYING A STOLEN VEHICLE AND PROPERTY IF IT IS RECOVERED

- Keep a record of your vehicle's VIN, license plate number, and insurance information. Also keep a list of equipment that might be stolen from your vehicle with its type, make, model, serial number, and fair market value.
- Etch your driver license number on all valuable, removable items, e.g., audio equipment.
- Etch the VIN on various places on the vehicle itself. Do not use your Social Security number.
- Spray microdots carrying the VIN all over the vehicle.
- Keep a good photograph of your bike in a safe place. Also record its serial number and any personalization, i.e., stickers, markings, etc. And keep purchase receipts and manufacturer information.
- Mark and photograph all bike parts that might be sold separately. Use the bike's frame number. Put the marks in visible and secret places.

BUYING A USED VEHICLE

- Be suspicious of a ridiculously low price or a fresh paint job on a late-model vehicle, especially a luxury car or SUV.
- Be suspicious of low mileage for the age of the vehicle. The problem of odometer fraud is more common in newer vehicles that have accumulated high mileage in a short time. Indicators of actual mileage include wear on tires, floor mats, seats, and pedals. If you suspect odometer fraud you should consider buying a vehicle history report from a commercial website by going online and searching for "vehicle history report." If you suspect that the odometer has been rolled back or tampered with on a vehicle purchased from a used car dealer you should file a complaint in writing with the DMV. Go to the Forms section of its website at www.dmv.ca.gov and download a Record of Complaint Form with Instruction and Additional Information.
- Make sure the seller is the owner named on the vehicle title. Don't be afraid to ask to see some photo ID.
- Verify past insurance and financing, and current registration and license plate sticker.
- Make sure the VIN has not been tampered with and matches the number on the vehicle title, registration, and proof of insurance. Thieves have been known to sell stolen vehicles with cloned VINs, i.e., those of vehicles not stolen. Call the San Diego County Regional Auto Theft Task Force at **(858) 627-4000** if you find any discrepancies.
- Obtain both sets of the original keys.
- Make sure registration fees paid to dealer are sent to DMV promptly.
- Don't be fooled by online sellers who promise ways to avoid the sales tax on a vehicle purchase. Don't trust any company that asks for a wire deposit made out to an individual. They have no vehicles to sell and you will lose your deposit in an untraceable transaction. And if you see any potentially fraudulent or misleading vehicle sales ads, report them to the California DMV Investigations office at **(858) 627-3951**.

SELLING A VEHICLE

- Never sell your vehicle to someone without meeting him or her in person.
- Never agree to sell a vehicle to someone who does not want to see it or test drive it.
- Meet a prospective buyer in a public place.
- Obtain the following information from a prospective buyer whether or not he or she wants to take a test drive: full name, address, phone number, driver license state and number, and insurance company and policy number. Note the expiration dates of the license and policy. If you go on a test drive tell someone you trust where you are going, the time you expect to return, and the prospective buyer's name and address.
- If you let the prospective buyer(s) take a test drive without you, set a time for him or her to return, and ask to hold his or her vehicle keys.
- Secure payment by cash or cashier's check. Verify it validity of a cashier's check with the issuing bank before you give your vehicle to the buyer. Your bank may cash the check, but if it doesn't clear you will have to return the money. And never take a personal check.
- Require payment in full. Don't sell on installments.
- Don't agree to any plan where the buyer gives you a check for more than the sales price and asks you to refund the difference. The "payment" check is likely to be fraudulent.