

VEHICLE SAFETY

Vehicle Security

Although a professional car thief can defeat most security measures and quickly break into and steal a locked vehicle, most vehicle thefts and break-ins are carried out by amateurs who take advantage of the carelessness of drivers in leaving vehicles unlocked, valuables in sight, etc. Security conscious drivers lose less than those who are careless. According to the FBI, most cars are stolen because they are easy to steal.

The tips in this section deal with preventing vehicle theft or break-ins, helping to recover a stolen vehicle or property from a vehicle, preventing vandalism, and buying a used vehicle. You can significantly enhance the security of your vehicles by following them.

Preventing Theft or Break-ins

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

- 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 lots or garages where you don't have to leave your keys.
- Park in your garage, if you have one. 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, or even in your driveway. Close all windows and lock the trunk and hood.
- Don't leave spare keys in your vehicle. An experienced thief knows all the hiding places. Store spare keys in your wallet.
- 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 car does not have one.
- 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.

To prevent theft of the vehicle itself:

- 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. Use one every time you leave your vehicle unattended. Steering wheel locks are inexpensive and are recommended by some experts to be the most cost-effective theft deterrent on the market today.

- Install fuel or power cut-off switches.
- Buy a vehicle with a locking ignition or steering column.
- Chain motorcycles and bicycles to stationary objects when unattended.
- Consider having your VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) etched on all the windows.

To prevent the theft of property from a vehicle:

- Never leave any contents or valuables in plain sight. Remove cellular phones, audio systems, computers, packages, sport equipment, cameras, purses, etc. Lock them in the trunk before you park or take them with you. And if you can't replace an item, don't leave it anywhere in your vehicle.
 - Install locking devices on batteries, wheels, audio equipment, etc.
- Make several slices through your license plate registration sticker after it has been placed on the plate. If the plate or sticker is stolen, call the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) immediately to report the loss and get replacements.

Recovering a Stolen Vehicle or Property Taken from a Vehicle

- Call the police immediately and provide a complete description of the vehicle and any property taken from it, including a license plate. Vehicles should be described by: year, make, model, color(s), VIN, insurance company and policy number, license plate number and state, and name of any tracking and locator system installed in the vehicle. Property should be described by type, make, model, serial number, and fair market value.
- Etch your driver's license number on all removable valuable items, e.g., audio equipment. Also etch the number on various places on the vehicle itself.
 - Don't leave your driver's license in the vehicle.
- Keep a record of the VIN, license plate number, and insurance information in your wallet or purse. Also be able to provide the information listed above for any property that might be stolen from the vehicle.
 - Don't leave your vehicle title (pink slip) in the vehicle.
- Install a vehicle tracking and location system that can be activated after the vehicle is reported as stolen.

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 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.
- Buy a vehicle with interior hood and trunk lock releases. Install a secondary hood lock if your car does not have one. Also install a locking gas tank cap.