

Auto theft and vehicle burglaries are on the rise, but that doesn't mean that you have to become a victim. Just by taking a few common sense precautions, you can protect your vehicle and your valuables.

### Lock It Up

- Locking your vehicle is the number one most important thing you can do to safeguard your belongings. Many thieves are opportunists, with little skill or no tools to pick a lock.
- Roll up your windows. If you feel you must leave them cracked for ventilation (such as in the height of the summer heat), do it as minimally as possible, and no more than 1/2". Make sure that all wind-wing or side vent windows are shut and locked.
- Keep your trunk locked, or your tailgate & shell if you have a pick-up truck. Also lock any interior compartments, such as the glovebox or an under-the-seat drawer.
- Always lock your vehicle and take the keys with you, even if you only plan on being away for a few seconds. This includes stops at ATMs, gas stations, dry cleaners, and anywhere else where you will be outside of your vehicle.

### Out of Sight, Out of Mind

- Items left in plain sight are what thieves look for. Commonly stolen items include cell phones, CDs, CD players, MP3 players, car stereos, GPS navigation systems, handheld videogame systems, money, cameras, laptops, and more. Take any valuables with you when you leave your vehicle.
- If you have valuable items that you can't or don't want to take with you, make sure you secure them out of sight in the trunk or glovebox (making sure to lock it!) *before* you reach your destination. The best time to do this is before you even start driving. Never hide things *after* you park, as many thieves watch for people doing just that, especially at busy places such as shopping malls, grocery

stores, high schools/colleges, sports complexes, parks, etc. Remember that cup holders, center consoles, and dash compartments are NOT good hiding spots.

- Anything gift-wrapped should be similarly hidden out of sight.
- When shopping at multiple stores at the same location (such as at a shopping mall), don't make special trips out to your vehicle to drop off packages. Many stores or mall concierges will hold packages for you until you're ready to drive away, and some will even help you bring them out. Especially during a large sale event or a busy shopping season, thieves will be looking for people who load up the car with gifts and walk away.
- Keep your garage door opener in your purse or briefcase, NOT on the visor or in the console.

### Park Wisely

- Don't leave your vehicle parked in an unattended parking lot for an extended period of time. Vehicles are far more likely to be stolen from unattended lots than from attended lots or the street.
- If parking in a public parking lot, try to use a lot that does not require you to leave your keys. The attendant will put your keys on a marked hook so that he or she knows which space has which vehicle, and a thief can take the time to select a vehicle and then steal the keys from the attendant.
- If you must leave your keys with an attendant or valet, only provide the vehicle key; better still, if your vehicle has a "valet key" that cannot open the trunk or glovebox, provide that instead. Never leave your house or other keys with a parking attendant.
- When it's dark out (or close to it), or if you will be returning to your vehicle after dark, park in a well-lit area with lots of people around. Thieves

like shadows and isolation.

- Never attach a tag to your keychain with your name and address, unless you want whoever finds your lost keys to be able to get into your home too—or take your vehicle if it's in the driveway.
- When parking along a curb, turn your wheels sharply toward it to make it more difficult for thieves to steal your car by towing it. If you have a locking steering column, turn your wheel to lock it after you've turned off the engine and removed the key.

### **Make it Tough**

- When buying a vehicle, check to see what types of anti-theft devices it has, such as an alarm, locking steering column, ignition cut-off, laser encrypted or microchipped keys, etc.
- If you don't have an alarm on your vehicle, consider purchasing one. This can sometimes result in a discount on your insurance policy, and if installed when the vehicle is purchased can usually be financed in with the vehicle itself. Thieves don't like to call attention to themselves.
- Also consider purchasing a vehicle tracking device, such as LoJack®, which will help law enforcement locate your vehicle if it does get stolen (usually within a few hours from the time it's reported). Much like an alarm, these systems can also result in an insurance discount, and can be financed when installed at the time of vehicle purchase.
- Steering wheel locks (such as The Club®) can make it impossible for a thief to drive your car, since they prevent the wheel from being turned. Versions are available that lock the steering wheel to the foot pedals to prevent acceleration or braking as well.
- Advertise! If you have an alarm or vehicle tracking system, say so! Place any stickers that came with your products in conspicuous places, such as the driver and front passenger windows. Much like alarm company signs for houses, thieves generally don't want to take the chance that you're bluffing, so they're likely to pass up your vehicle and try the next one instead.

### **Carjacking**

Carjacking is a less common form of vehicle theft, one that is very violent.

- Keep your doors locked and your windows rolled up when you're in your vehicle.
- Be alert to your surroundings and of people approaching your vehicle.
- It may be less convenient, but stick with traffic. Avoid lightly traveled streets, especially after dark.
- When stopped in traffic, always leave yourself enough room to make an emergency getaway if needed.
- Keep your car and house keys on separate key chains.
- If someone threatens you with a weapon, GIVE UP THE VEHICLE. Your vehicle is not worth your life.

### **More Tips**

- Keep your vehicle registration card in your wallet, not your car. Don't give someone who steals your car your address too.
- For trailers, use a locking tow hitch with a padlock, and securely chain down any equipment or vehicles (including jet-skis, motorcycles, and ATVs), even if parked in your garage.
- Consider using a wheel lock when you park a motorcycle. Much like a steering wheel lock, these special locks are resistant to cutting, and make your motorcycle undriveable until removed.
- Write down your VIN (located on the driver's side of the dash, or in the driver's door frame) and keep it in a safe place.
- Use an electric engraver to etch your driver's license state and number into your stereo, GPS, catalytic converter (particularly bolt-on models), and any other valuable equipment on or in your vehicle—for example, CA A0123456.
- Locking gas caps are an inexpensive and easy way to keep thieves from siphoning your gas.