

DON'T MAKE IT EASY FOR PROFESSIONAL THIEVES TO TAKE YOUR VEHICLE.

Take these steps and others to reduce theft opportunities.

*Lock it and pocket the key whether you leave for a minute or several hours. Close windows all the way and make sure the trunk is locked.

*Control your keys. Never leave an identification tag on your key ring. If your keys are lost or stolen, this could help a thief locate your car and burglarize your home.

*Don't leave your registration inside your vehicle, but carry it with you. Important identification papers or credit cards should never be left in a glove compartment.

*Keep everything of value that you can in your trunk. If you do leave packages, clothing, or other articles in the car, make sure they're out of sight or covered.

*Park in well-lighted and busy areas. Avoid leaving your vehicle in unattended parking lots for long periods of time. If you park in a lot where you must leave the key, leave the ignition key only.

*When buying a car, ask about anti-theft options such as steering column locks, alarms, switches that interrupt the fuel or electronic systems, and locks for tape decks, batteries, and gas tanks. Many insurance companies offer reduced rates to owners who install security devices.

*Keep your car's VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) and a complete description in a safe place at home. Since 1969, the federal government has required manufacturers to engrave a unique number, the VIN, on all passenger cars in one visible and several hidden locations. One VIN is engraved on a metal plate on the dashboard near the windshield. VINs are registered with the FBI's computerized National Crime Information Center.

Tips to Protect Special Vehicles

Bicycles, Motorcycles, and Trail Bikes

*Park it out of sight in a garage or basement or use a cover.

*Mark it with an Operation Identification number recommended by local law enforcement.

*Lock your bicycle with a case-hardened chain or cable and lock, winding the cable through the frame and both wheels and then around a fixed object.

*Use the fork lock found on most street motorcycles. For extra protection, invest in a heavy U-shaped lock made of extremely hard steel that cannot be hacksawed or a case-hardened chain and sturdy padlock.

*Watch out for key numbers! Some motorcycle manufacturers stamp the key number on the lock. With this number, anyone can go to a key maker and have a key cut that will fit perfectly. Many key makers ask for identification but don't take any chances - write down your key number and then file it off the lock.

Trucks and Recreational Vehicles

*Many specialized vehicles don't have VINs and should be marked with an identification number, such as a driver's license.

*Lock up all easy-to-carry items like motors and camping gear before leaving your

vehicle.

*Use secured "toppers" or tool boxes. Don't assume a thief can't lift a box because it's heavy.

License Plates

*License plates frequently are stolen from other cars and used on stolen cars for other crimes. Get in the habit of checking your plates when you drive. A few drops of solder on the bolts or blurring the threads will help safeguard your plates.

Avoid Buying A Stolen Vehicle

*Verify that the VIN plate is intact and check it against the VIN on the ownership documents.

*Ask the seller about the vehicle's history and past financing and insurance. Verify this information with the bank or insurance company.

*Be wary when purchasing used parts for auto repairs - you could be patronizing a "chop shop" and indirectly encouraging auto theft.

What To Do If It Happens To You. . . *If your vehicle is broken into or stolen, inform the police immediately. Stolen vehicles are often used in the commission of another crime. Quick action by you may not only aid in recovering your vehicle, but prevent its use for illegal purposes.

Take Action Today!

1. Get your Neighborhood Watch group to look out for abandoned and suspicious vehicles and educate its members on preventing vehicle theft.
2. Check your state's laws regarding salvage titles, secure ownership documents, and VIN inspection programs. Are they sufficient protection against professional thieves and "chop shops"?
3. Engrave the VIN in several locations on the car, such as the door frame or under the hood and trunk lids.
4. Fill in the vital records form for your car and file it away in a safe location.