

Richland County Sheriff's Department

LEON LOTT
Sheriff



Auto theft is a crime of opportunity that can be prevented. We successfully reduced the number of automobile thefts in Richland County in 2004 but I am not satisfied. One victim is one to many in any crime category and I would like to ask your help in reducing the number of automobiles stolen. Below is a list of tips that may help prevent the chances of your becoming a victim:

Common Sense is Your Best Defense against Auto Theft:

1. Lock your car and take your keys with you.
2. Never hide a second set of keys in your car.
3. Park in well-lit areas.
4. Never leave your car running unattended. Vehicles are commonly stolen at ATMs, convenience stores, day care centers, etc..
5. Completely close all car windows when parked.
6. Don't leave valuables in plain view.
7. Park your vehicle with wheels turned toward the curb.
8. If your vehicle is rear-wheel drive, back into your driveway to make towing more difficult for thieves.
9. Conversely, if your vehicle is front-wheel drive, pull forward into your driveway.
10. Always use your emergency brake when parked.
11. If you have a garage, use it.
12. When parked in a garage, lock the garage door as well as your vehicle.
13. Never leave the registration or title in your car.
14. Replace "T-shaped" door locks with straight locks.
15. Stolen cars are more easily traced when Vehicle Identification Numbers (VIN) have been etched on car windows.
16. Engrave expensive accessories and major parts with your VIN or personal identification number.

Please contact the Richland County Sheriff's Department if we can be of assistance to you or if you would like to receive free crime prevention training at 803-576-3000 or www.rcsd.net,

Sincerely,

Sheriff Leon Lott

Common Sense is Your Best Defense against Auto Theft:

17. Lock your car.
18. Take your keys.
19. Never hide a second set of keys in your car.
20. Park in well-lit areas.
21. Park in attended lots.
22. If you park in an attended lot and have to leave your key with an attendant, leave only the ignition and door key.
23. Never leave your car running unattended. Vehicles are commonly stolen at ATMs, convenience stores, etc..
24. Completely close all car windows when parked.
25. Don't leave valuables in plain view.
26. Park your vehicle with wheels turned toward the curb.
27. If your vehicle is rear-wheel drive, back into your driveway to make towing more difficult for thieves.
28. Conversely, if your vehicle is front-wheel drive, pull forward into your driveway.
29. Always use your emergency brake when parked.
30. If you have a garage, use it.
31. When parked in a garage, lock the garage door as well as your vehicle.
32. Never leave the registration or title in your car.
33. Remove the electronic ignition fuse, coil wire, rotor distributor, or otherwise disable your vehicle if you are leaving it unattended for an extended period.
34. Replace "T-shaped" door locks with straight locks.
35. Stolen cars are more easily traced when Vehicle Identification Numbers (VIN) have been etched on car windows.
36. Engrave expensive accessories and major parts with your VIN or personal identification number.
37. Drop business cards, address labels or other identification inside vehicle doors.

Investing In Vehicle Protection

22. Ignition kill switches* prevent the engine from starting.
23. Fuel kill switches* halt the fuel supply.
24. Visible steering wheel locks prevent the steering wheel from being turned.
25. Floorboard locks disable the gas or brake pedal to prevent the use of these pedals.
26. Gearshift locks disable shifting of the transmission.
27. Tire or wheel locks prevent the vehicle from moving.
28. Hood locks prevent thieves from gaining access to your security system and battery.
29. Armored collars around the steering column deter thieves from breaking into the steering column to get to the ignition wires.

Electronic Security Systems

30. Audio alarms* emit loud warning sounds when the doors, hood or trunk are opened.
31. Vehicle tracking systems* which are installed in your vehicle, are activated when your car is stolen. These systems alert the police to the location of your vehicle for quick recovery.

*See your local garage or accessory store about installation.

Beware of "HOT" Used Car Deals

Buying a stolen car is a crime. Even if you unknowingly purchase a stolen a vehicle, you could still lose the car and your money. Avoid becoming the car thefts second victim by following these tips:

32. Be suspicious of any deal that seems "too good to be true."
33. When buying from a private individual, make sure the title and registration match the name and address of the person selling the car.
34. Be cautious of a seller with no fixed address, place of employment or phone number.
35. Ask the seller for references about past financing and insurance on the vehicle. Verify the information with the bank, finance company or agent.
36. Be sure the VIN plate on the automobile's dash is present, secure and has not loose rivets.
37. Check to make sure the VIN plate has not been repainted and the numbers stamped in the plate appear to be original factory numbers.
38. Check the VIN plate rivets to ensure they are original. All 1970 and newer autos produced in North America have stainless steel "rosette" rivets with six petals and a hole in the middle. They are difficult to scratch with a knife.
39. Thieves may remove the VIN plate and replace it with one from a similar wrecked vehicle. If in doubt about plate authenticity, check with a new car dealer who handles the same model or contact a law enforcement agency.
40. The VIN on the dash must match the VIN on the registration, title and federal safety inspection sticker on the driver's door.
41. If the VIN plate is scratched, bent or missing rivets, tampering may have occurred.
42. Make sure the federal safety inspection sticker, located on the door or door jam, is securely in place and none of the numbers appear to have been tampered with.
43. Beware of a loose dashboard.
44. An excessively loose ignition switch may indicate tampering. Check the switch for chisel or pull marks.
45. Be wary of a fresh paint job on a newer vehicle. This may indicate an attempt to change the car's identity.
46. Check the inspection and license plate stickers to be sure they are current and issued by the same state.
47. If the seller provides you with only remade keys, not original manufacturer's keys for a newer model car, be suspicious.
48. Titles and registrations can be counterfeited. Therefore, demand the title before paying, and make sure it matches the registration.
49. Question the seller if the registration was recently issued on a older vehicle.
50. Check the engine identification numbers with all the other numbers to ensure a match.

Most frequently stolen cars – nationally in 2002:

1. Toyota Camry
2. Honda Accord
3. Honda Civic
4. Chevrolet Full Size C/K Pickup
5. Ford Full Size Pickup (150/250/350)
6. Jeep Cherokee/Grand Cherokee
7. Oldsmobile Cutlass/Supreme/Ciera
8. Dodge Caravan/Grand Caravan
9. Ford Taurus
10. Toyota Corolla

Different types of auto theft

Vehicles may be stolen for any of a number of reasons and to further any number of purposes. Here are some of them.

To sell the entire vehicle

One of the most common reasons to steal a car is simply to sell it again, in the same way that any stolen property is “fenced” illegally. Often thieves will take the car across state lines or even international borders. To escape detection, identification numbers may be altered or obliterated, titles and registrations forged, and the vehicle repainted.

To sell the parts

Perhaps even more frequently, vehicles are stolen in order to obtain the parts. Selling the parts individually may bring a thief two or three times what he could get selling the vehicle whole. Gangs of car thieves will set up “chop shops” that can strip a car down to its component parts in a matter of minutes. Often these thieves work in partnership with crooked repair shops and mechanics who are eager to purchase the stolen parts at a discount.

To obtain transportation

Sometimes a thief will steal a vehicle simply to provide transportation for himself. Typically, the thief will use the vehicle for his own purposes only for as long as he deems it safe, then abandoning or selling the vehicle before it can be traced to him.

To trade for drugs

This increasingly alarming trend is often referred to as “cars for crack,” since that is the drug most often associated with this type of car theft. The addict will “loan” his vehicle to a crack dealer in exchange for the drug. The drug dealer, in turn, uses the vehicle to transport his drugs, or even commit other crimes, with no threat of having to forfeit his own property when caught. If the drug dealer does not return the car or the car is seized by law enforcement, the addict reports the car as stolen to his insurance company. Should the insurance company settle the claim, the addict will usually use the money to buy more drugs. On the other hand, if the car is returned, the addict simply repeats the process.

To go joyriding

Auto thefts by juveniles for status or thrills continues to be a major problem. Often, the stolen car is simply abandoned later, but increasingly juvenile thieves are becoming involved in “cars for crack” or are working in collusion with organized criminal operations.

To commit other crimes

Sometimes, vehicles are stolen in order to be used in the commission of other crimes, such as drive-by shootings, burglaries and armed robberies. By using a stolen car, the criminals hope to reduce the chances that the crime will be traced back to them.

To commit insurance fraud

This type, usually referred to as an “owner give-up,” typically involves either leased vehicles with very high mileage whose turn-in costs are high or purchased vehicles whose owners no longer desire to make the monthly payments. The owner arranges to have the vehicle stolen or abandons it in a known high-theft area (hence, the “give-up”). In some cases, the owner may simply hide the vehicle somewhere and report it stolen to the police and insurance company. To ensure that the car is a write-off, the owner may actually burn the vehicle to obtain a total loss. While initially investigated as a vehicle theft, this criminal act is also insurance fraud.

To clone your vehicle

Nowadays, thieves can even steal your car without you knowing it! By removing your owner's registration and insurance card from your vehicle, a thief can use those documents to obtain a license plate registered to you. The thief then steals a vehicle which is identical or similar to yours and counterfeits your vehicle's identification number (known as a VIN) onto it. The result is two vehicles with the same VIN and registration. Naturally, if the stolen vehicle is involved in an accident or used in a crime, the police will think it's yours. Clearing up the confusion can be a lengthy and annoying process. Your best bet: don't keep your registration and insurance cards, or any other pertinent vehicle information, in your vehicle.