Vehicle and Parking Lot Security

Many police chiefs are reporting that 2011 is becoming an epidemic year! Laptops, wallets, checkbooks, gym bags and portable navigation systems are the most common items left out in plain view and stolen by criminals. It takes just three seconds to break a window, jimmy a door and steal YOUR property. This month’s SecurAlert discusses some basic precautions you can take to minimize becoming a thief’s next victim.

How do thieves do it?

Many car thieves and burglars are drug addicts and/or belong to crime rings or gangs, many times working in pairs to scope out a parking garage or lot for an easy target. One criminal will drive around the garage or parking lot; the other will walk looking for vehicles that are easy to enter. Most use cell phones and radios to communicate with each other for a quick get away.

Thieves will target vehicles that are parked in dark places, away from cameras or pedestrian activity. They will peer into a vehicle and look for items left out in the open, such as portable navigation systems, cell phones, IPODs, wallets, purses and back packs. Two out of three cars usually have something of value left out in the open!

A vehicle can be entered in seconds. The criminal uses a screw driver or similar tool and pops it into the door handle or right below the lock. Or, the more amateur will simply break a window using a special tool or just a brick or other hard object. Once inside the vehicle, the criminal can open the trunk or truck bed and take any valuables that may have been stored there.

In cities and towns across the US, there is a crime wave sweeping the nation – vehicle break-ins.
What can you do? Prevention Is the Key!

- Keep your vehicle VISIBLE: Park in well lit and populated areas, if possible.
- Park – wheels first - with your wheels turned at an angle to prevent unauthorized towing; some criminal rings use tow trucks to steal vehicles; they don’t arouse suspicion because everyone thinks the vehicle is disabled and needs towing.
- Remove ALL valuables from the inside of your car or completely out of view including check books, electronics, wallets, brief cases or other items – THIS IS THE NUMBER ONE action you can take to significantly reduce your risk of becoming a victim.
- Keep the inside of your vehicle clean; even if you just keep a lot of “junk” and non-valuable materials in the vehicle – the criminal doesn’t know that and may try to break in to sift through your vehicle’s contents.
- Disconnect portable navigation devices and take down the storage cradle or suction cup. These systems are THE NUMBER ONE item of choice by criminals to steal. An empty cradle, suction cup, MP3 adapter or a power plug signals to the thief that you have a navigation unit or other electronic device and it is probably in the vehicle.
- Never place valuables in your trunk before you leave your vehicle in the lot or garage or when going to the gym or store – the criminal will observe this; if you need to use your trunk, transfer valuables BEFORE you get to your destination.
- LOCK your doors, close your windows tight and close your sunroof – you will be amazed how many vehicles are entered through an unlocked door.
- Activate your alarm before you leave the garage or lot.
- If you go to the gym, never place your keys in a gym bag – keep them with you; criminals will take a stolen set of keys and press the remote alarm to find the vehicle.
- NEVER, NEVER, NEVER leave a vehicle running at a convenience store, gas station ATM or other location. Many vehicles are stolen every year due to this carelessness. A vehicle left running is also a safety hazard and could result in a huge liability lawsuit against you if the vehicle lurches out of gear or otherwise causes damage or physical injury.
- When pumping gas or paying for it, keep your wallet and purse WITH YOU; don’t leave it in the vehicle or on the floor of the vehicle – criminals often target gas stations for this reason.

Each year $1.3 billion in personal items and accessories are stolen from vehicles. In 2009, nearly 2 million vehicles were broken into and 790,000 vehicles were stolen.
When giving your keys to a valet, only give them your ignition key or starter “fob”; keep your home keys WITH YOU!

NEVER keep a spare key in your vehicle.

If your vehicle is expensive, consider installing LO-JAC, On-Star, or similar system that can track your vehicle and shut it down in the event it is stolen.

Don’t keep your vehicle’s registration or insurance card in the vehicle – keep it on YOU; if a criminal is pulled over and can’t produce an insurance card or registration, it will cause suspicion and further investigation.

Report ALL suspicious persons or activity – people walking around looking at vehicles; people loitering around the garage; persons sitting in a vehicle for an extended period of time.

What happens when your vehicle is stolen or vandalized?

Immediately contact security (if the location has security) and report the incident
- Many victims simply shrug off the incident and don’t report it to property management.
- Property management and security need to know when incidents occur so they can determine how they took place, warn other tenants and employees and take the appropriate steps to help prevent it from happening to someone else.

Call 911 to report the incident
- Crime statistics reflect reported crime so it’s important that law enforcement are advised of all criminal activity so they can get the resources they need to combat it.

Report the incident to your insurance company

Make sure you know your license plate or tag number
- Many drivers know their social security number, date of birth and other key information by memory but have never memorized their license tag number.

Make sure your vehicles VIN or vehicle identification number is quickly available to you if your vehicle is stolen (that’s why keeping your insurance and registration card with you is helpful)

For more information go to these websites or contact your local police department:

   www.autotheft.com
   www.autothiefs.com
   www.ncpc.org
   www.crimepreventiontips.org

Did you know that:

- One-third of motorists admit they have left their car while it was running, which makes the vehicle an easy target for theft.
- 47% don’t always park in a well-lit area.
- 40% don’t hide their valuables. In fact, nearly half leave mail in their vehicle, a quarter have left a purse or wallet, and almost a third have left bank statements, all of which can put them at risk for identity theft.

DON’T BE ONE OF THESE MOTORISTS!