office of neighborhood involvement

Promoting a culture of civic engagement by connecting and supporting all Portlanders working together and with government to build inclusive, safe and livable neighborhoods and communities.

1221 SW 4th Avenue, Suite 110
Portland, Oregon 97204

tel 503-823-4000
fax 503-823-3050
tty 503-823-6969

Amanda Fritz
Commissioner

Amalia Alarcón de Morris
Bureau Director

City/County
Information & Referral Line
503-823-4000

This document is available at the ONI website:
www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/cp

Car Prowl Prevention

Office of Neighborhood Involvement Crime Prevention Program
Winter 2010

Theft from vehicle, more commonly know as car prowl, is the unlawful taking of motor vehicle contents or parts. Car prowls are crimes of opportunity. An offender makes a split second decision to break into a vehicle based on a perception that there are items of value in that vehicle, therefore making the potential payoff worth the risk.

This crime is consistently one of the top three reported crimes in Portland during the last five years. Although there is no profile of a typical car prowler, a number of offenders break into vehicles to support drug addictions. One offender broke into 15-20 vehicles per day at the height of his drug addiction.

A car prowl can be completed in a minute or less, and a significant number of these crimes occur between the hours of 10:00 pm to 4:00 am. Methods of entry include: entering into the vehicle through an unlocked door, breaking a window, or using a wedge to gain access. The offender often wears a backpack or bag to transport stolen items.

Items frequently stolen include GPS systems, laptops, electronic devices, CDs, mail/bills, documents with personal information, purses/wallets, luggage, gym bags, money, cell phones, insurance cards, vehicle registration, and shopping bags.

Car prowls are a gateway to other crime like:

- Identity Theft
- Burglaries
- Vehicle Theft

Steps to Car Prowl Prevention

The good news is that car prowls are one of the easiest crimes to reduce with increased awareness and a change in habits. The following preventive measures will reduce the chances of being the target of a car prowl:

- Keep the interior of your car “showroom” clean. Never leave valuables, including bags, purses, wallets, briefcases, laptops, cell phones, loose change or anything that may appear valuable to a thief in plain view.
- Remove garage door openers, key cards, and house or work keys from the car so a car prowler cannot gain access to your home.
- Don’t store or leave credit cards, identification or personal information in your glove box or anywhere in your car.
- If you have to leave valuables in your car, put them in the trunk before you get to your destination.

Steps to Car Prowl Prevention *Continued*

- Before leaving your parked car, always remove the keys, roll up the windows, lock the car and set the alarm (if you have one).
- If possible, store your car in a closed and locked garage. If your car is stored in a carport or parked near your house, leave your exterior home lights on throughout the night.
- Consider replacing the light fixture closest to your car with a motion detector unit. Motion detectors are good psychological deterrents, causing the thief to think that someone has seen them when the light comes on. Additionally, the light makes the prowler or thief more visible.
- Create visibility. If you park on the street, choose a well-lit, open space even if it means adding additional street or yard lighting. Trim back trees or bushes that block your view of your vehicle.
- Park in busy, well-lighted areas. Avoid parking near anything that limits visibility like dumpsters, large vans or trucks, or wooded areas.
- Use a mechanical locking device such as a club that locks to the steering wheel, column, or brake to deter car theft.
- Keep your keys with you; avoid putting keys in "hiding places."
- Avoid leaving your vehicle in unattended parking lots for long periods of time.
- When you pay to park in a lot or garage, leave just the ignition key with the attendant. Make sure no personal information is attached. Do the same when you take your car in for repairs.
- Carry the registration and insurance card with you when you leave your vehicle. NOTE: Make sure you have these items with you when you return. Operating the vehicle without these documents is against the law.
- Investigate security systems if you live in a high-theft area or drive an automobile that is an attractive target for thieves. You may get a discount on your auto insurance.
- Organize a Neighborhood Watch. Get to know your neighbors; share contact information – phone numbers, emails – and look out for each other. The people who live on your block are the most likely to recognize suspicious people or suspicious activity.
- Be observant when you exit or enter your parked vehicle, stop and take a look around the area.
- Report any suspicious activity to the police.

What to Do if Your Car is Broken Into

If your car is broken into, report the crime to the police. If it's a crime in progress, contact 9-1-1. If not, contact the non-emergency number 503-823-3333 to report the incident. Take note of any details of the suspects, vehicles, and or activities, and share your observations with the police.

If the thief is caught and arrested, request to pursue charges against the individual(s). Ensure your case is aggressively pursued by contacting the District Attorney's Office, 503-988-3860, to learn the necessary steps.

How to Work Together as Neighbors

One of the most important things is to always report suspicious activity to the non-emergency line at 503-823-3333 and crimes in progress to 9-1-1. Encourage your neighbors to keep an eye out for any suspicious activity, and to keep their cars clear of items. One car prowler stated that if a neighborhood consistently kept their vehicles free of valuables, he would move on to another neighborhood.

Please share the information that you've read in this brochure with your neighbors and make sure to let them know if you or any of your neighbors have been a car prowl victim. A good way to share the information with neighbors is through your Neighborhood Watch or Foot Patrol. If you are interested in organizing one, contact your Crime Prevention Coordinator for more information on how to get started.

Crime Prevention Program

Ask for the Crime Prevention Program Coordinator in Your Neighborhood
503-823-4064
www.portlandonline.com/oni/cp