



*To organize and support  
community partnerships to prevent  
crime and the fear of crime*

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[www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/cp](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/cp)



# Car Prowl Prevention

Office of Neighborhood Involvement Crime Prevention Program  
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Car prowling 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.

Car prowling is consistently one of the **top three reported crimes** in Portland. 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 addiction.

A car prowling can be completed in a minute or less at any time of day and in a variety of settings, including parking lots and staffed parking garages. 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, hacking keyless entry systems, using keys on older model cars or using a wedge or other tools to gain access. The offender may wear a backpack or bag to transport stolen items.

**Items frequently stolen** include laptops, electronic devices, GPS systems, mail, bills, documents with personal information, purses, wallets, luggage, gym bags, money, cell phones and chargers.

## Car prowls are a gateway to other crime such as:

- Identity Theft
- Burglaries
- Vehicle Theft

## Steps to Car Prowl Prevention

Car prowling is one of the easiest crimes to prevent with increased awareness and a change in habits. The following steps will reduce the chances that your vehicle will be targeted:

- Keep the interior of your car "showroom clean" with nothing in it. Offenders have broken in to vehicles for items such as gym bags because they assumed there were electronic devices and other items stored in them. You never know what they may consider valuable.
- If you must store valuables in your car, hide them or place them in the trunk before you arrive at your destination in the event that a prowler is casing the area. Lock your trunk with a valet key, so a thief can't easily pop open the trunk from the car's interior. Never leave bags, purses, wallets, briefcases, laptops, cell phones and loose change in plain view.
- Hide chargers and accessories that indicate a GPS, mobile phone or other device may be stashed in your vehicle.
- Remove garage door openers, key fobs, and house, work and car

## Steps to Car Prowl Prevention *continued*

keys so that a prowler cannot steal your car or commit burglary. Keep your keys with you instead of putting them in a hiding place.

- Don't store or leave credit cards, identification or personal information in your glove box or anywhere in your car.
- Before leaving your car, always remove the keys, roll up the windows, lock the doors and set the alarm (if you have one).
- Place your key fob or proximity key in a Faraday bag/cage (RFID-blocking) after locking your car to thwart hacking.
- If possible, store your car in a closed and locked garage. If it is parked in a carport or near your house, leave your exterior 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.
- Improve visibility where your car is parked. If you park on the street, choose a well-lit, open space even if it means adding additional exterior lighting. Trim back trees or bushes that block the view of your vehicle from your home. Avoid parking near anything that

limits visibility such as wooded areas, dumpsters, large vans or trucks.

- Don't leave your vehicle in unattended parking lots for long periods of time.
- When you pay to park in a lot or garage, leave only the ignition key with the attendant. Remove any personal information from your key chain or car. Do the same when you visit a mechanic.
- 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.
- Consider installing a security system 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 such as phone numbers and email addresses 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, call 9-1-1. Share your specific observations of the suspect(s), vehicle(s) and activities with the police dispatcher. If the crime already occurred, contact the police non-emergency number at 503-823-3333 or file online at [www.portlandoregon.gov/police/cor](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/cor) if there is NO known suspect. When you report crime, the Portland Police Bureau becomes aware of trends and can direct resources to the impacted areas. If the thief is caught and arrested, call the District Attorney's Office at 503-988-3860 to pursue charges against the individual(s).

## How to Work Together as Neighbors

Report suspicious activity, such as a person checking door handles, to the police as it is occurring. If it's not a crime in progress, you can call the police non-emergency line at 503-823-3333. Encourage your neighbors to keep an eye out for any suspicious activity, and to keep their cars showroom clean. One car prowler stated that if a neighborhood consistently kept their vehicles free of valuables, he would move on to another neighborhood.

Please let your neighbors know when there are car prowls in your neighborhood and what they can do about it. 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.

### **City of Portland's Crime Prevention Program**

The Crime Prevention Program provides prevention advice, organizes and trains Portland residents and businesses on crime issues. To connect with a Crime Prevention Program Coordinator in your Portland neighborhood: Call 503-823-4064 ❖ Email [onicpa@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:onicpa@portlandoregon.gov)

Request a training at [www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/trainingrequest](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/trainingrequest).