



Myths and Facts about Auto Theft: July is Car Theft Awareness Month

Auto theft is a big business that provides financing for international crime rings and local meth addicts...it's not just joyriders. Here are some of the facts about car theft in America today with some thoughts about what works and what doesn't.

([PRWEB](#)) July 16, 2004 -- Since July is "Auto Theft Prevention Month" you may have already seen tips from your auto insurer or local police about how to protect your car from theft. Most of their advice is plain common sense: take your keys and valuables with you, lock your door, roll up your window, avoid parking in dark places, etc. Unfortunately some "tips" only perpetuate urban legends from twenty years ago. Car theft is a multi-billion dollar business run by professionals that has evolved since the 1980s when it last peaked during the "crack epidemic". Here are some misconceptions and facts about car theft today.

Car theft is a non-violent, "one-victim" crime. It's estimated that 90% of all stolen cars are involved in a secondary crime like robbery, drug transportation and people smuggling. That works out to about a million secondary crimes associated with car theft every year. In Canada, they figure a stolen car is over 200 times more likely to be involved in an accident than average. A stolen car is very dangerous.

It's mostly joyriding - no harm no foul. The relatively few car thieves who do it "just for kicks" are usually underage or under-the-influence. Twelve-year-old kids don't know how to drive safely even if they wanted to. Car thieves hopped up on meth know that police are under orders to avoid high-speed pursuit. So when they are being followed by a police cruiser, they escape by intentionally driving recklessly at high speed. With a life expectancy of five years, a meth addict knows no fear behind the wheel.

If your car is stolen, your insurance will make you whole. If you have ever sold your car to a used car dealer, you know there is a spread between what he pays you and his selling price. For most cars, it's 15-25%. Guess which amount you'll get from your insurer? You won't get anything for your inconvenience or mental anguish and don't forget your deductible. If you lose a \$20,000 car, you are probably out \$5,000.

A car alarm or steering wheel lock will stop most car thieves. After years of aggravation, car alarms are now viewed as a major source of noise pollution. They don't do much to stop theft either. Most of us ignore them if we can. Alarms can be disabled in a few minutes by dedicated professionals and tweaking meth addicts alike. Likewise bypassing a steering wheel lock requires only a hacksaw and a few minutes. Active antitheft devices like "clubs" and "brakelocks" are only effective if you remember to use them.

Didn't you see *Gone in 60 Seconds*? Car thieves are cool. Would you leave your wallet filled with \$25,000 in cash in your driveway? From a risk-reward perspective, car theft ranks near the top. It attracts international criminal gangs, most with ties to terrorism, drug dealing and prostitution. Car theft is also a major source of cash flow for drug addicts particularly meth users who cannot hold down a regular job. In the West, police estimate that over 70% of all car thieves are meth addicts. Not cool.

Car theft is just not that important compared to "serious" crime. Car theft is the largest property crime in the United States. The Highway Loss Data Institute, a US insurance industry-sponsored organization estimates that the average car theft costs the insurance industry over \$6000. Adding the uninsured out-of-pocket costs to owners and the additional burden on the law enforcement and health care systems, CASI estimates the total cost of an "average" car theft is over \$10,000. With over 1.2 million car thefts in 2002, car theft represents a drag of



over \$12 billion on the US economy every year.

Like the poor, car thieves will always be with us. Yes there will always be car thieves, but we can cut their numbers. In Europe, South Africa, Canada and Australia, governments have stiffened relevant regulations on carmakers and owners. The smart keys you see on high-end cars in the US have been mandatory on all cars in Europe for almost 10 years. With widespread uptake of electronic immobilizers and vehicle parts marking systems, car theft has dropped as much as 50% in some countries. To be sure, thieves are getting smarter but there are fewer of them. It's just not that good a business any more. We can do the same here with an aggressive program of education, regulation and financial incentives to bring modern automotive security technology to the US. Until then, take the common sense advice and look out for your car.

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