

About Carjacking

The crime of “carjacking”—which is stealing a car by force—captures headlines across the country. Statistically speaking, however, your chances of being a victim of carjacking are very slim, and taking preventive measures can reduce that risk even more. Carjacking can take place anywhere, although some locations—like ATMs, gas stations, public parking lots & garages, and intersections with traffic lights—are more common.

There are no guarantees that you or someone close to you will not become the victim of a carjacker; however, there are a number of things that you can do to reduce the risk of becoming a victim.

Getting in your vehicle

- Walk with purpose and **STAY ALERT!**
- Be wary of people asking for directions or handing out fliers. **TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS!** If something makes you feel uncomfortable or uneasy, get into your car quickly, lock the doors and drive away.
- **ALWAYS** approach your car with the key in your hand. Look around, under and inside the car before you get in.

When you are on the road

- Drive in the center lane to make it harder for potential carjackers to approach the car.
- **AVOID** driving alone. Travel with someone whenever possible, especially at night.
- When you are coming to a stop, leave enough room to maneuver around other cars, especially if you sense trouble and need to get away.
- Always drive with the doors locked. If a thief can't get in your vehicle, you stand a better chance of leaving with it.
- **DON'T** stop to assist a stranger whose car has broken down. You can help instead by driving to the nearest phone (or using your cell phone) to call police for help.

Getting out of your vehicle

- Park in well-lit areas, near sidewalks or walkways. **AVOID** parking near dumpsters, large vans or trucks, woods, or anything else that limits your visibility.
- Try to park in a garage with an attendant. Leave only the ignition key, with no identification.
- Even if you're rushed, **LOOK AROUND** before you get out and **STAY ALERT** to the surroundings. Again, trust your instincts if the situation doesn't “feel right,” and get away.

Theft from Auto

One of the most common types of theft is theft of valuables from your automobile. Theft from auto is strictly a crime of opportunity that can be prevented if you take away the opportunity. Thieves generally won't waste their time breaking into autos that don't have valuables in plain sight.

- The best way to prevent theft from your auto is to always keep valuables “outta sight.” Never leave cell phones, briefcases, suitcases, or small electronic devices (personal music devices, digital assistants, etc.) in your car in plain view. Take these items with you, or secure them — all the time, every time!
- If your car has a trunk, use it. Put valuables in there or in a locked glove compartment. Hiding items under seats is better than leaving them in plain view, but securing them inside the glove compartment or trunk is a far better deterrent.
- During the holiday season especially, or any time you're shopping, place packages in the trunk, not on the passenger seats or floors.
- Look for car radios or other sound systems that can operate only in the vehicle it was originally installed in. This reduces the risk of theft.
- If you can unfasten your sound system and take it with you, or lock it in your trunk, do so. And don't forget to do the same with your CDs and tapes.
- Also, keep your car doors and windows locked — all the time!

Contact Information

MPD Auto Theft Unit
300 Indiana Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 724-1360



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Metropolitan Police Department
300 Indiana Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

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Protecting Your Vehicle from Theft and Tampering



Tips for protecting your vehicle from being vandalized, broken into, and stolen

FOR YOUR SAFETY



Adrian M. Fenty
Mayor

Cathy L. Lanier
Chief of Police

Save yourself the trouble.

Every day in the District of Columbia, about 18 vehicles are stolen. These stolen vans, cars, motorcycles and trucks cost victims time AND money, as well as increase everyone's insurance premiums. Often, stolen vehicles are used to commit other crimes.

You can save you and your family a lot of frustration, stress, and interruption to your daily life by taking some simple precautions to reduce the risk of having your vehicle become a target. Following are some steps you can take to make your car — and the valuables it may contain — less attractive to thieves.

Exercise Common Sense

An unlocked vehicle with a key in the ignition is an open invitation to any thief, regardless of any anti-theft device you may use. The common-sense approach to protection is the simplest and most cost-effective way to avoid would-be thieves.

You should always secure your vehicle, even if you're parking for "just a minute." Do this by:

- Removing your keys from the ignition.
- Locking all of your doors.
- Closing all of your windows.



- Parking in a well-lit area.
- **Never** leaving your engine running and vehicle unlocked while you run into your home, a convenience store or anywhere else.

Employ Visible or Audible Deterrents

A visible or audible device alerts thieves that your vehicle is protected. Popular devices include:

- **Audible alarms** are typically equipped with motion or impact sensors that trigger a 120-decibel siren. The alarm should have an automatic shut-off capability.
 - **Steering wheel locks** prevent the steering wheel from turning.
 - **Steering column collars** prevent thieves from hot-wiring the vehicle. Some collars are installed permanently; others must be continuously activated.

- **Theft deterrent decals** visually warn thieves the vehicle is protected by an alarm or other anti-theft device
- **Tire locks** similar to the circular steel boots used by many police departments, prevent the vehicle from being driven.
- **Window etching.** If the vehicle identification number (VIN) is etched onto the vehicle's windows, it makes it difficult for thieves to resell the vehicle or its parts.

Use a Tracking System or Vehicle Immobilizer

A tracking system that emits a signal to police or a monitoring station when the vehicle is reported stolen. Tracking systems are effective in helping authorities recover stolen autos.

Vehicle immobilizers prevent thieves from bypassing your ignition and hot-wiring the vehicle. Some electronic devices have computer chips in ignition keys. Other devices inhibit the flow of electricity or fuel to the engine until a hidden switch or button is activated. Popular third-level devices include:

- Smart keys — contain specially-coded computer chips or radio frequencies. Without the exact key, the vehicle's engine cannot be started.
- Fuse cut-offs.
- Kill switches — inhibit the flow of electricity or fuel to the engine until a hidden switch is activated.
- Starter, ignition and fuel disablers

Take Care When Buying a Car

Being prudent when buying a used — or new — car can help prevent you from serious headache or frustration down the road. Here are some ways to avoid being scammed:

- **LOOK CLOSELY** at the vehicle identification number (VIN) plate, located on the driver's side of the dashboard, to see if it appears tampered.

- **NEVER** buy a used car without getting the vehicle's title or pink slip **in person**. Double-check the VIN with the number listed on the title, the registration papers and the federal certification label on the driver's side door.
- **ASK TO SEE IDENTIFICATION** of the person who is selling you the car. Record his/her name, address, phone number, and driver's license number. Call the phone number given to you by the vehicle's owner. Often, scam artists will provide the phone number of a pay phone.

If you're considering buying a used car, there are several companies that, for a nominal fee, will run the VIN through their computers and check the history of the vehicle. The companies can be found on the Web by performing a search for "Vehicle History Reports."

Types of VIN Scams

Vehicle Identification Numbers (VINs) are serial numbers for vehicles that are used to differentiate similar makes and models; every vehicle has a unique VIN. VIN plates are located on the dashboard and can be viewed through the windshield.

VIN Switch: Thieves use VIN switching to disguise the identity of a stolen vehicle. They will replace the VIN on a stolen vehicle with a VIN that is not recorded as stolen. The thief will then try to resell the stolen car to an unsuspecting customer.

Salvage Switch: A vehicle that is extensively damaged, burned or stripped, and determined not to be eligible for repair is called "salvaged." Thieves buy a salvaged vehicle just to obtain the title and the VIN. Then, they go out and steal a car that is the same make and model, and switch the VIN plates.

