



## **VEHICLE SECURITY AND RELATED TIPS**

SDPD Crime Prevention

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Although a professional vehicle thief can defeat most security measures and quickly break into and steal a locked vehicle, most vehicle break-ins and thefts are carried out by amateurs who take advantage of driver carelessness in leaving vehicles unlocked, valuables in sight, etc. The tips in this paper deal with measures for preventing most kinds of crimes involving vehicles. Additional tips on personal safety and security, home security, travel safety and security, preventing fraud and identity theft, etc. can be obtained on the Prevention Tips page of the SDPD website at **[www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/tips](http://www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/tips)**.

### **PREVENTING CRIMES INVOLVING VEHICLES**

This section contains tips for preventing the crimes involving vehicles listed in the CONTENTS.

#### **Vehicle Break-Ins**

The following tips help prevent vehicle break-ins, which could lead to theft of the vehicle or of things in it.

- Park in an open, well-lighted, and populated area near your destination, preferably one in view of a security camera. Avoid parking near trucks, vans, camper shells, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Also avoid parking near people loitering or sitting in vehicles.
- Never leave anything in plain sight, not even empty bags or boxes. Conceal all navigation aids, cellular phones, audio systems, sunglasses, etc. inside your vehicle. Put cameras, packages, sports equipment, firearms, hand tools, and other valuables in the trunk before you park, never after you park because thieves may be watching. And take anything you can't afford to lose with you, e.g., a wallet, purse, or laptop computer. Thieves usually don't break into vehicles unless they plan to steal what's visible inside.
- Park in lots or garages where you don't have to leave your keys.
- Park in your garage at home, if you have one. Don't leave your vehicle on the street, in an alley, or on your driveway. If you have to park on a street, avoid dark or isolated areas.
- Turn off your engine, roll up all windows, lock all doors, and take your keys with you even if you are making a quick stop at a store or gas station. Also make sure the trunk and hood are locked.
- Don't leave your vehicle in an unattended public lot for an extended period time.
- Buy a vehicle with interior hood and trunk lock releases. Install a secondary hood lock if your vehicle does not have one.
- Replace knob-type door lock buttons with tapered ones.
- Install an alarm system that will sound when someone attempts to break in, move, tilt, or start your vehicle. Always activate the system when leaving the vehicle.
- Check your vehicle if you hear the alarm sound. But don't try to stop a person attempting to break in. Get a good description of the person and call the police.
- When you lock your vehicle with a Remote Keyless Entry (RKE) fob make sure that all the doors are locked before leaving your vehicle, especially in public parking lots. There has been an increased use of jammers to prevent the RKE signal from activating the door locks.

### **Thefts of Parked Vehicles**

The following tips are in addition to the ones listed above for preventing vehicle break-ins.

- Conceal maps or travel brochures that might indicate you are a tourist.
- Turn your wheels sharply toward the curb when parking on a street.
- Use anti-theft devices that can be attached to the steering wheel or column, or brake pedal.
- Install fuel or power cut-off switches.
- Buy a vehicle with a locking ignition or steering column.
- Attach a tire lock or boot to the rim of one wheel.
- Don't hide a spare key on your vehicle.

### **Thefts from Vehicles**

- Never leave anything of value in plain sight. Conceal all navigation aids, cellular phones, audio systems, sunglasses, etc. inside your vehicle.
- Take anything you can't afford to lose with you, e.g., a wallet, purse, or laptop computer. Put cameras, packages, sports equipment, firearms, hand tools, and other valuables in the trunk before you park, never after you park because thieves may be watching.

- When shopping, ask the store to hold all your purchases until you are finished there so you can carry everything to your vehicle in one trip. If you need to make more than one trip, put your purchases in the trunk and move your vehicle to a different area of the parking lot after each trip.
- Make sure that any valuables that were locked in the glove box or trunk were not taken or tampered with when you return to your vehicle. Thieves are able to get into some vehicles without leaving any visible signs of a break-in.
- Take the removable face of your CD player with you even if you are going to be gone for a few minutes.
- Lock truck-bed toolboxes.
- Install locking devices on batteries, wheels, audio equipment, spare tires, gas tanks, etc.
- Make several slices through your license plate registration sticker after it has been placed on the plate. If the sticker is stolen you can get a replacement from your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office.
- When pumping gas and no one else is in your vehicle, roll up all the windows, lock the doors, and take your keys with you so you don't lock yourself out of the vehicle. This will prevent someone from taking anything you may have left in the vehicle, e.g., a purse on the front seat, while you are not looking.

### **Personal Attacks in Parking Lots, Garages, and Other Places**

- Avoid parking or walking near strangers loitering or sitting in vehicles. Check that no one is hiding around your vehicle before you get out or in.
- Park in open, well-lighted, and populated areas near your destination. In a garage, park where you don't have to use stairs or elevators.
- Never park next to trucks, vans, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Check that no one is hiding around your vehicle before you get out.
- Lock your vehicle and take your keys with you. Make sure the windows are closed and nothing of value is in sight.
- Conceal maps or travel brochures that might indicate you are a tourist.
- Have someone escort you to your vehicle if you are concerned about your safety and are uncomfortable about walking alone. Or wait until there are more people around.
- Remember where you parked so you can return directly to your vehicle. Be alert and walk purposefully. Have your key in hand so you can open the door immediately when you return to your vehicle.
- Don't overload your arms with packages. Use a cart or make another trip.
- Be aware of your surroundings and the people around you. Don't be distracted while walking to your vehicle. This includes fumbling with your purse or packages, looking for keys, and using a cell phone.
- Check that no one is hiding in or around your vehicle before you get in.
- If a van has parked next to your vehicle, enter it on the other side.
- Lock the doors immediately after getting in your vehicle.
- Don't resist or argue with a person who wants to steal your vehicle. Your life is much more valuable than your vehicle. Be especially alert when parking at fast food places, gas stations, ATMs, and shopping areas along suburban highways.

## **Personal Attacks While Driving**

- Keep your doors locked and your windows closed.
- Know where you are going. Stop and get directions before you get lost.
- Avoid driving alone, especially at night and in dangerous areas.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- Drive to the nearest open business and call **911** if anyone is following you. Don't go home.
- Keep your vehicle in gear when stopped for traffic signals or signs. Try to leave room to drive away if threatened. Be alert for anyone approaching your vehicle.
- Keep purses and other valuables out of view when driving alone. Put them in the trunk or on the floor.
- Honk your horn or flash your emergency lights to attract attention if you are threatened while in your vehicle.
- Stay in your vehicle if you stop to aid others. Find out what the problem is and offer to call or drive to the nearest phone and report the situation.
- Keep your vehicle in good mechanical condition so it won't break down and leave you stranded on the road. Also keep enough gas in the tank so you won't run out.
- If your vehicle breaks down or runs out of gas, pull over to the right as far as possible, raise the hood, and call or wait for help. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked until you can identify any person who comes to help.
- Be wary of minor rear-end collisions, especially at night on dark freeway off-ramps. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked if you are uneasy or suspicious. Drive to the nearest open business to check the damage and exchange insurance information.
- Control your gestures and other reactions to keep "road-rage" incidents from escalating to violence.

## **Thefts of Motorcycles**

- When at home, park and lock your bike in the garage, preferably behind a car. And make sure the garage is secure.
- When out, park in a well-lighted area in full view of people in the area and within the coverage of a security camera.
- Try to avoid parking between larger vehicles as they provide cover for thieves.
- Do not leave your helmet or riding gear with your bike.
- Lock your ignition and remove the key. Also lock your bike's forks or disc brakes with a large external lock.
- Cover your bike when you leave it unattended. Use a cover with grommets so the cover can be locked in place. And set the alarm to activate when the cover is removed. Few thieves will risk a blind theft. They usually look for certain models.
- Chain and lock your bike to a secure, immovable object when it's unattended. Use a high tensile-strength chain and a matching security lock. Loop the chain through the rear wheel or frame and make sure it is tight around your bike. Do not let it rest on the ground. And use multiple locks. A thief might be prepared for one but not the other.
- Lock bikes together when riding with others.
- Install a good audible alarm and a hidden kill switch.

## Thefts of Bicycles

- If you have to leave your bike outside, secure it to a rack in a busy public location. Avoid leaving it overnight.
- The best locks to use for securing bikes to racks are U-locks or chain locks. U-locks have a thick steel shackle that is attached to a crossbar with a keyed lock. Chain locks have tough links that are typically attached with a small disc lock that requires a key to open. Locks should secure the frame and both wheels. Secure all removable parts or take them with you.
- Never leave an expensive bike unattended outside. Any bicycle lock can be defeated.
- Never leave an expensive bike in a common storage area in a multi-unit residential building. Keep it in your unit.
- The best bicycle enclosures are made of metal and secured with high-security shrouded-, shielded-, or hidden-shackle padlocks. Shrouded-shackle padlocks are designed to expose as little of the shackle as possible, which makes them more difficult to attack with bolt-cutters and saws. Shielded-shackle padlocks are ordinary padlocks that are covered with a metal shield that prevents a person from cutting the shackle or the hasp with a bolt cutter. The shield would be open at the bottom for a key to be inserted to open the lock. Hidden-shackle padlocks, sometime called hockey pucks, have their shackles encased by the body of the lock, hence the name. This feature makes it nearly impossible to access the shackle, so any attempts to cut or pry the lock are useless as long as the hasp is able to accommodate the shackle dimensions and the depth within the padlock. The shackles on these padlocks cannot be cut with a bolt cutter.

## Vehicle Vandalism

- Park in open, well-lighted, and populated areas near your destination. Avoid parking near trucks, vans, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Avoid parking near strangers loitering or sitting in vehicles.
- Park in your home garage, if you have one. Don't leave your vehicle on the street, in an alley, or on your driveway. If you have to park on a street, avoid dark or isolated areas.
- Don't leave your vehicle in an unattended public lot for an extended period time.

## Carjacking

These tips will help you prevent a robber from taking your vehicle when you are driving or in it. But if you do get involved with a robber, don't resist or argue. Your life is much more valuable than your vehicle.

- Lock the doors immediately after getting in your vehicle. Keep your doors locked and your windows closed.
- Know where you are going. Stop and get directions before you get lost.
- Avoid driving alone, especially at night and in dangerous areas.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- Keep a cell phone handy for use if you are threatened.
- Drive to the nearest open business and call **911** if a vehicle is following you. If there aren't any open businesses, call **911** from your vehicle and tell the dispatcher where you are. Don't go home.
- Keep your vehicle in gear when stopped for traffic signals or signs. Try to leave room to drive away if threatened. Be alert for anyone approaching your vehicle.

- Keep purses and other valuables out of view when driving alone. Put them on the floor or in the trunk.
- Honk your horn or flash your emergency lights to attract attention if you are threatened while in your vehicle.
- Stay in your vehicle if you stop to aid others. Find out what the problem is and offer to call and report the situation.
- Keep your vehicle in good mechanical condition so it won't break down and leave you stranded on the road. Also keep enough gas in the tank so you won't run out.
- If your vehicle breaks down or runs out of gas, pull over to the right as far as possible, raise the hood, and call or wait for help. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked until you can identify any person who comes to help.
- Be wary of minor rear-end collisions, especially at night on dark freeway off-ramps. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked if you are uneasy or suspicious. Drive to the nearest open business to check the damage and exchange insurance information.

### **Sale of Your Vehicle**

- Don't leave your driver license in the vehicle.
- Don't leave your vehicle title (pink slip) in the vehicle.

### **Home Break-Ins**

- If you use valet parking, don't leave your home keys on a chain with your vehicle keys. Also, don't leave your garage door opener where it is easily accessible. Keep your vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any other papers with your home address on them where a criminal is not likely to find them.

### **REPORTING CRIMES INVOLVING VEHICLES**

- Report all vehicles thefts, vehicle break-ins, and thefts of property from a vehicle ASAP even if the loss is small and you are not planning to file an insurance claim. These reports enable local law enforcement agencies to assess the magnitude and nature of these crime problems and assign prevention, patrol, and enforcement assets accordingly.
- Call **911** if the theft or break-in is in progress and provide the dispatcher with your location and a good description of the vehicle and the suspect. Signs of a possible bike theft include the following: (1) one or more people standing near a bike, (2) a bike being loaded into a van or truck, and (3) a bike being transported on its side.
- Call the non-emergency number of the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction in the area where the crime was committed if the crime is not in progress. In the City of San Diego the SDPD non-emergency numbers are **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. It's important to remain on the line to talk to a dispatcher and provide a good description of the vehicle and property involved.
- Describe stolen vehicles by year, make, model, color(s), Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), insurance company and policy number, license plate number and state, and name of any tracking and locator system installed in the vehicle.
- Describe stolen property by type, make, model, serial number, and fair market value. Stolen license plates can be replaced at your local DMV office.

- Describe stolen bicycles by type, serial number, and any personalization, i.e., stickers, markings, etc.
- If your vehicle is stolen in Mexico, report the theft to the local Mexican authorities and obtain a certified copy of the report. When you return home bring the report, your identification, and the vehicle title to a California Highway Patrol (CHP) office. After this, if you locate and recover your vehicle in Mexico, notify the U.S. Customs inspector when crossing the border. You will be sent to a secondary inspection area where a CHP or SDPD officer will examine the vehicle and check your identification. The officer will release the vehicle to the registered owner and remove it from the stolen-vehicle data base.

## **RECOVERING YOUR VEHICLE IF IT IS STOLEN**

- Install a tracking and location system that can be activated after the vehicle is reported as stolen.

## **IDENTIFYING YOUR VEHICLE AND PROPERTY IF THEY ARE RECOVERED**

- Keep a record of your vehicle's VIN, license plate number, and insurance information. Also keep a list of equipment that might be stolen from your vehicle with its type, make, model, serial number, and fair market value.
- Etch your driver license number on all valuable, removable items, e.g., audio equipment.
- Etch the VIN on various places on the vehicle itself. Do not use your Social Security number.
- Spray microdots carrying the VIN all over the vehicle.
- Keep a good photograph of your bike in a safe place. Also record its serial number and any personalization, i.e., stickers, markings, etc. And keep purchase receipts and manufacturer information.
- Mark and photograph all bike parts that might be sold separately. Use the bike's frame number. Put the marks in visible and secret places.

## **BUYING A USED VEHICLE**

- Be suspicious of a ridiculously low price or a fresh paint job on a late-model vehicle, especially a luxury car or SUV.
- Be suspicious of low mileage for the age of the vehicle. The problem of odometer fraud is more common in newer vehicles that have accumulated high mileage in a short time. Indicators of actual mileage include wear on tires, floor mats, seats, and pedals. If you suspect odometer fraud you should consider buying a vehicle history report from a commercial website by going online and searching for "vehicle history report." If you suspect that the odometer has been rolled back or tampered with on a vehicle purchased from a used car dealer you should file a complaint in writing with the DMV. Go to the Forms section of its website at [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov) and download a Record of Complaint Form with Instruction and Additional Information.
- Make sure the seller is the owner named on the vehicle title certificate. Ask to see the seller's driver license or some other government photo ID.
- Verify the DMV registration and license plate sticker.
- Make sure the VIN has not been tampered with and matches the number on the vehicle title, registration, and proof of insurance. Thieves have been known to sell stolen vehicles with cloned VINs, i.e., those of vehicles not stolen. Call the San Diego County Regional Auto Theft Task Force at **(858) 627-4000** if you find any discrepancies.

- Obtain both sets of the original keys.
- Check that the vehicle has not been reported stolen. Call the non-emergency dispatcher in your city or county with the vehicle's VIN. That number is **(619) 531-2000 or (858) 484-3154** for the SDPD. It's **(858) 565-5200** for the County Sheriff Department.
- Get an online vehicle history report to check for vehicle registration, number of past owners, salvage or junked titles, odometer readings, frame damage, accident history, service and repair information, vehicle usage, recalls, etc. This may help you make a more informed decision about a used car, truck, or SUV and keep you from buying a vehicle with hidden problems that will be costly to fix. Some reports are free but they provide limited information. Those that are more detailed are expensive, e.g., one CARFAX report costs about \$40.
- Don't be fooled by online sellers who promise ways to avoid the sales tax on a vehicle purchase. Don't trust any company that asks for a wire deposit made out to an individual. They have no vehicles to sell and you will lose your deposit in an untraceable transaction. And if you see any potentially fraudulent or misleading vehicle sales ads, report them to the California DMV Investigations office at **(858) 627-3951**.
- If you buy a car from a used car dealer, make sure the registration fees paid to dealer are sent to DMV promptly. Used car dealers in California collect DMV fees and process registration for vehicles they sell. They often hire local DMV service providers to process these transaction for them. Your purchase contract should include a list of itemized DMV fees. There should be no DMV interaction required by you unless you intend to request personalized license plates. Your new certificate of title should arrive in 6 to 8 weeks. Contact the DMV or the dealer if you don't receive it within this time period.
- Don't buy a vehicle from an unlicensed dealer. These dealers are illegitimate businessmen who often pretend to be private party, and for lack of a facility and licensing, display their vehicles for sale on public streets or at their residence. The vehicles they advertise will more than likely not be registered to them and their name will not appear on the title. Vehicles bought from them will usually have DMV documents with forged signatures on them. You may be an accessory to the crime if you knowingly send these documents to the DMV.
- If you buy a used vehicle from a private party, you need to transfer ownership into your name. The process is called a Title Transfer and it's simple to do. You can do it online at **www.NeedTags.com** in three easy steps, or you can do it in person at a DMV office or a local DMV service provider. The latter will have very little or no wait time, but there will be a service fee. You can get more information on the online transfer and do it at **www.needtags.com/online\_titletransfer.php?cid=174&tt=636&gclid=EA1aIQobChMIver6hZi01QIVTZF-Ch0g2waTEAAYASABEgJ24vD\_BwE**. This web page describes the documents you'll need to provide, i.e., the Certificate of Title on which the seller or sellers sign to release ownership, Bill of Sale, and maybe a Smog Certificate, and the title transfer fees. It also tells you what to do if the seller claims to have lost the pink slip, the amount of time do I have to change ownership and the penalty for being late, how to register an out-of-state vehicle in California, etc.
- Take the following measures to reduce the risk of being robbed when completing a vehicle purchase, especially with cash.
  - Meet during the day in a public place, e.g., a busy shopping center parking lot, a café, or a police station. Never meet at your home or the seller's home, or at some secluded place.
  - Have someone accompany you.
  - Tell a friend or family member when and where you are going.
  - Bring a cashier's check instead of cash.
  - Bring a cell phone.

## **SELLING YOUR VEHICLE**

- Never sell your vehicle to someone without meeting him or her in person.
- Never agree to sell a vehicle to someone who does not want to see it or test drive it.
- Meet a prospective buyer in a public place.
- Obtain the following information from a prospective buyer whether or not he or she wants to take a test drive: full name, address, phone number, driver license state and number, and insurance company and policy number. Note the expiration dates of the license and policy. If you go on a test drive tell someone you trust where you are going, the time you expect to return, and the prospective buyer's name and address.
- If you let the prospective buyer(s) take a test drive without you, set a time for him or her to return, and ask to hold his or her vehicle keys.
- Secure payment by cash or cashier's check. Verify the validity of a cashier's check with the issuing bank before you give your vehicle to the buyer. Your bank may cash the check, but if it doesn't clear you will have to return the money. And never take a personal check.
- Meet during the day in a public place to complete the sale, e.g., in a busy shopping center parking lot, a café, or a police station. Never meet at your home or the seller's home, or at some secluded place.
- Require payment in full. Don't sell on installments.
- Don't agree to any plan where the buyer gives you a check for more than the sales price and asks you to refund the difference. The "payment" check is likely to be fraudulent.
- Complete and submit either in person, online, or by mail a Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability (REG 138) to the DMV within 5 days of the date of the sale, gift, or trade. Your name will be on DMV record until the new owner pays transfer fees and completes the title transfer process. However REG 138 will relieve you of responsibility for civil or criminal actions involving the vehicle after you've sold, gifted, or traded it.