

Protecting Your Motor Vehicle

Motor vehicle thefts in Janesville are like most other crimes reported in our area - they're usually committed by amateurs who simply take advantage of easy opportunities.

For example, a key is used in about 1 out of 5 motor vehicle thefts reported in the U.S. each year. In Janesville, it's 2 out of 3. Most occur either after owners left a vehicle parked with the engine running, with keys in the ignition, or with spare keys hidden inside the vehicle. Others involved family members or acquaintances taking keys and vehicles without permission.

So you really don't need expensive alarm systems or other gadgets to protect your car, truck, or van. All it takes is the common sense to avoid leaving keys where the wrong person can find them.

Motor vehicle thefts are so easy to prevent, they shouldn't be a problem but they are. In fact, last year more than 100 motor vehicle thefts were reported in Janesville.

The typical suspects are juveniles out for a joyride, so nearly all our stolen vehicles are eventually recovered. But if they're in good shape when stolen, those vehicles usually aren't by the time they're found. Some are involved in traffic accidents. Many are found vandalized or stripped of valuable parts, while others are set on fire. Some even end up in the Rock River.

That's something to think about the next time you're tempted to leave the keys in your car or truck.

Remember: We need your help to prevent motor vehicle thefts in Janesville!

Theft from Motor Vehicles

It's called "Car Shopping". People go out at night, roam the streets and parking lots of Janesville, climb into parked vehicles, and steal whatever they can find. Coins, CD's, sunglasses, GPS Units, cell phones, maybe a wallet or purse... anything is fair game.

With over 1,000 incidents reported each year, car shopping is a serious problem in Janesville. The popularity of compact vans and pickup trucks hasn't helped, since valuables that once could be hidden in the trunk of a car are now being left out where car shoppers can find them.

Car shopping has even led to an increase in motor vehicle thefts in Janesville. If someone finds a set of keys while looking through a parked vehicle, the vehicle itself usually ends up stolen.

What can you do to prevent someone from car shopping in your vehicle?

- 1.) When parking vehicles outside, always lock the doors. Most car shoppers don't have the skills or the patience to unlock a door.
- 2.) Store valuables out of sight. Park in a locked garage if you can. Put your GPS unit, purse, briefcase, camera and tools in the trunk or hide them under a seat or blanket.

A special note to parents: Most car shoppers are juveniles. If your child can't tell you exactly where those new sunglasses, CD's or cell phone came from, you'd better try to find out. Car shopping isn't just an innocent pastime-it's a crime and punishable by law.

Tips

GPS Units are valuable, easy to conceal and easy to re-sell. That's why they're among the most popular items thieves steal from parked vehicles. If you own a GPS unit, don't leave it sitting in a parked vehicle. Also be sure to record the serial number and engrave the detector with identification so you can claim it if stolen and later recovered by the police.

The **Trunk** is the place for valuables if you must store them in a parked vehicle. Use the trunk to keep tools, cameras, sporting goods, or anything of value locked safely out of sight.

Door Locks were invented to keep motor vehicles and their contents out of the hands of criminals. They're still your first line of defense against theft. When leaving your vehicle in a parking lot, on the street, or even in your own driveway, **always** be sure to lock the doors.

Think of **Garage Door Openers** as keys. Several local residents have had their garages cleaned out by burglars after leaving a remote garage door opener in a vehicle parked in the driveway overnight. Keep them out of the wrong hands by locking your car doors-better yet, take the opener with you.

Magnetic Key Boxes are a good way to keep extra keys handy. The trouble is that car thieves think so too. If you worry about locking yourself out of your vehicle, try hiding an extra door key in your wallet or purse instead. But don't carry your ignition key, which could be used to steal your vehicle if the purse or wallet is stolen.

Car Alarms are a good investment if you own an expensive automobile, or if you are moving to a large city where there are professional car thieves at work. In Janesville, where most criminals are amateurs, simpler precautions like minding your keys and locking the doors usually are enough to stop a thief. So, alarm systems may not be such a good idea. The same advice applies if you're thinking about buying a steering wheel lock for your car or truck.

Pickup Truck, Van and Hatchback owners face special problems, since they don't have trunks where valuables can be stashed. Locking the doors provides some protection, although thieves will sometimes resort to breaking windows if the items in view look especially tempting. If there's no place to hide, you might be better off arranging your trips between home, work and shopping so you won't have to leave valuables in your parked vehicle at all.

Keys are used in 2 out of 3 of all motor vehicle thefts in Janesville. Never leave the keys in the ignition when you park, and don't hide spare keys in the ashtray, on the visor, under the floor mat, or anywhere else "no one would ever look:"

That **Hood Release** on your dashboard is another reason to keep doors locked when parking outside overnight. Locked doors put that release out of reach, so a thief will have an awfully hard time getting under the hood. Forget to lock up, and you might find out how awfully hard it is to start your car or truck after the battery's stolen.

A **Glove Compartment** is the first place a thief will look when rummaging thru parked vehicles. Spare keys, credit cards, cash, watches, jewelry, and other valuables simply don't belong in the glove compartment.

CD's aren't covered under most auto insurance policies. Too bad, because they're popular targets for thieves. Store CD's at home, not in your vehicle, where they're likely to attract the attention of a thief.

An **Engine** should only be running when someone- is behind the wheel. Never leave a vehicle unattended with the engine running-it only takes a minute for someone to jump in and drive away while your back is turned.

A **Garage** is still the best place to safely store motor vehicles. But even the sturdiest garage won't do much good if the garage doors aren't locked. Even if you do park indoors, you should still take the keys with you.

For additional information, please contact the Janesville Police Department at (608) 755-3133.