Partners In Crime Prevention

Inside This Issue

SNOCAT– *Snohomish County Auto Theft Task Force*

Recently, statistics have been released showing that auto thefts have been reduced by just over half (52%) as compared to last year in Snohomish County. This is the sharpest decline in the state.

Sheriff's Office staff attributes this decline to a new task force, the Snohomish County Auto Theft Task Force (SNOCAT), that concentrates on catching car thieves. It has had an immediate affect since it started in October 2008.

The task force came into affect as a result of state legislation passed in 2007. By 2005 the car theft problem became so bad that in the state of Washington:

- 138 cars were stolen a day
- 1 car was stolen every 11 minutes
- Nearly 50,000 cars were stolen during the year
- Washington residents had a 1-in-179 chance that their car would be stolen (The national average in 2005 was 1-in-207)
- The total cost contributed to stolen cars was $325 million.

As a result of this situation the Elizabeth Nowak-Washington Auto Theft Prevention Act was enacted by the Legislature. It stiffened penalties for car theft so that prosecutors could obtain longer sentences for convicted car thieves with fewer past convictions. It also imposes mandatory minimum sentences for juveniles convicted of car theft.

The legislation also created the Washington Auto Theft Prevention Authority (WATPA). WATPA deals with education, prevention, law enforcement, investigation, prosecution and confinement issues related to car thefts. WATPA is funded through a $10 surcharge that has been placed on all traffic tickets. (For more information go to http://watpa.waspc.org/watpa.html)

SNOCAT is a multi-jurisdictional task force consisting of detectives from the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office, Monroe, Lynnwood and Marysville police departments, and the Washington State Patrol. The Everett police department and the Snohomish County Prosecutor's Office also contribute staff. It is one of eight auto theft task forces in the state.

Since the legislation was passed, an average of 87 cars are stolen statewide instead of 138 cars per day.

While progress has been made, car theft remains a serious property crime problem. In 2008, nearly 32,000 vehicles were stolen in Washington State. Long term statistics show that car theft is still up by 21% since 1995.

Car Thefts– *A Continuing Problem*

Auto Theft Prevention Tips

- *Park in well lit areas. Avoid alleys and other isolated areas.*
- *Remove all valuables. Don't leave anything that could be construed as valuable in sight.*
- *Don't leave your vehicle running unattended.*
- *Ensure windows are completely closed.*
- *Lock the doors!!!*
- *Install a steering wheel lock such as "The Club" or other type device.*
- *Install an alarm system with a kill switch.*
- *Install a vehicle tracking system like "LoJack" or similar system. If you have a GM car, subscribe to "Onstar".*
- *Install a locking fuel cap.*
- *Leave the vehicle title in a secure place such as a safety deposit box at your bank or your home in a safe.*
- *If you have a garage, use it to park your car at home*

Despite the progress with the new legislation and the task force, Snohomish County unfortunately remains a leader in the state for car thefts. Between 2007 and 2008, car thefts were reduced by 45% in Snohomish County. But Snohomish County was the 3rd worst county in the state for car thefts. In 2008, car thefts amounted to $20,000,000 in worth in the county.

Car thefts are frequently linked to other crimes. Car thieves can use a stolen car as transportation to commit burglaries, to purchase illegal drugs or to commit robberies.

In March, SNOCAT team members arrested a man for vehicle theft led to the discovery of $300,000 worth of stolen property in a rental locker, motel room and storage shed (The Herald http://heraldnet.com/article/20090322/NEWS01/703229897#Police.recover.more.than.%24300000.in.stolen.property)

Items included a very large plasma TV, 20 cell phones, several laptop computers, bicycles, cameras, an expensive tool chest with tools, and expensive heirloom jewelry.

Team members went through the property to try to find any with markings that would let them return the property to the rightful owners. Property that could not be identified stayed with the burglar.

Car thieves can also be car prowlers stealing whatever they see in your car. That is why it is important for you not to leave any valuables, including your wallet, purse, cell phone, laptop, visible in your car.

With ID theft the problem that it is now, be especially careful not to leave anything that has your bank account numbers, credit card numbers, or other personal information.

The registration that you are required to keep with you and be able to present to when asked by a police officer can be used by some car thieves to find your house or to sell your car. To prevent this, carry your car's registration in your wallet or purse.

Other targets of car thieves include catalytic converters for the precious metals contained in them and engines by illegal street racers who constantly need new engines.

Taking simple steps to prevent your car from being stolen goes a long way. According to Sergeant E.J. Swainson of SNOCAT, there have been no reports of a stolen car with an anti-theft device.

Locking your doors is important. He also recommends using a visible deterrence such a the club, an alarm decal (even if it is fake) and VIN etched windows.

For more information on what you can do to prevent your vehicle from being stolen go to:

http://sheriff.snoco.org/Documents/JanFeb04.pdf

Traffic Enforcement Unit–
Ensuring Our Safety on the Streets

For several years the Sheriff's Office has deployed the "Motors" Unit which is made up of deputies on motorcycles who enforce traffic laws during the day. Last year, the Sheriff's Office started the Traffic Enforcement Unit (TEU) which operates between 6pm and midnight.

The TEU enforces traffic laws, investigates minor car crashes and conducts DUI emphasis patrols.

TEU deputies also support area deputies with emergence calls for service and priority calls for assistance when extra manpower is needed.

The TEU works with the Traffic Operations Section of the Transportation and Environmental Division in Public Works to plan emphasis patrols to enforce traffic laws.

The Sheriff's Office web site has an online form for traffic related complaints at:

http://sheriff.snoco.org/
Contact_Information/
Contact_Information.htm

Click on "Submit a Traffic Complaint" and fill out the form.

Traffic Operations studies the reports and the reported sites of the traffic complaints and then makes recommendations to the TEU for locations and time of day for "enforcement activity".

If you observe an in progress traffic issue feel free to report it to 911. Ask for telephone contact with a deputy.

The TEU can enforce county traffic ordnances and state traffic law. The TEU cannot enforce traffic laws on private property, except for DUI and reckless driving. It also cannot enforce home owners association covenants and rules.

The Sheriff's Office receives more calls related to traffic than for any other call for service. While emphasis on traffic laws may seem trivial to some, enforcing traffic laws promotes safety in our community. Speeding, DUI and reckless driving all pose dangers to our community. Also, police working on traffic emphasis frequently find felons in the course of making traffic stops.

Identifying Your Valuables

Identifying and cataloging your valuables is important not only for preventing a burglary or recovering your valuables from a burglary, it does the same for car thefts and car prowls.

VIN etching- You can have the VIN number of your vehicle etched into the windows and sometimes some of the body panels of your vehicle. When car thieves see windows that have been etched, they stay away from your car because it is harder to sell the car or its parts.

Operation ID- Operation ID, where you engrave your driver's license number onto valuables such as electronics, is normally associated with burglary prevention. But, it is important especially since we frequently take electronic equipment in our cars. If you don't engrave your laptop or cell phone at least keep a listing of their serial numbers in a safe place.

Social Networking– *The Modern Way to Talk to the Neighbors*

One of the basic objectives of Neighborhood Watch programs is to get neighbors to talk to each other. This helps to let everyone in the neighborhood to at least know who their neighbors are and, in the best of situations, encourages neighbors to work together to solve community problems.

Modern, suburban life has thrown up obstacles to building teamwork within communities. The suburbs, cars and TV have acted to isolate families from their neighbors. According to Robert Putnam's "Bowling Alone" (http://www.bowlingalone.com/) the number of people willing to volunteer has steadily declined since World War II. Some of the reasons for this include:

- Sprawl– "...each additional ten minutes in daily commuting time cuts involvement in community affairs by 10 percent."
- TV and media– More time in front of the TV is less time talking to neighbors or working out local problems. TV also favors personalities over issues and communities of interest over communities of place.

Early Neighborhood Watches relied on telephone trees and regular meetings to spread information about crime in their areas and to work out local problems.

With the increasing use of email, individuals can more easily communicate with each other at times that are more convenient for each individual. Email is fast replacing the telephone for basic communications within Neighborhood Watch programs.

Kids have adopted "social networking" web sites to communicate with each other. As with many other parts the web, geography does not matter. The Annenberg School for Communications at the University of Pennsylvania started i-neighbors.org as a non-profit web site in 2004 "...to help people create neighborhoods that are safer, better informed, more trusting, and better equipped to deal with local issues."

i-neighbors.org allows neighbors to correspond among themselves, organize events, exchange information about businesses, and share documents among other things.

This is one of a few websites that attempts to use modern technology to overcome the isolation of our modern life.

For more information go to:

www.i-neighbors.org

CRIME STOPPERS Of Puget Sound

1-800-CRIME-13

Tip Lines:
Phone:
      425-388-3845
Sheriff's Website:
www.co.snohomish.wa.us/SheriffRpts/AnonymousTips/default.htm

Crime Prevention Coordinators:

Office of Community Partnerships-
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