



# COMMUNITY POLICING in Snohomish County

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## Car Theft/Prowls– *The Problem*

Car thefts remain a big problem in Snohomish County and Washington State.

Washington State ranks 3rd in the nation for car thefts with a car being stolen every 27 seconds. On average, 150 cars are stolen every day in the state.

A thief can take as little as 1 to 3 minutes to break into a car, start it and then drive off. For a thief who sees something of interest like your cell phone, purse, mail or package, it takes even less time. At the beginning of the 2003 Christmas season, the Crime Prevention Alliance of Snohomish County demonstrated how easily, quickly and quietly a thief can break into a car.

If you become a victim of a car prowl, you face bearing the replacement cost for anything that is stolen. Generally, the contents of your car are not covered, including CD's, jewelry, and special stereo systems and speakers. And, deductibles are commonly \$250 or \$500 for covered items.

If your car is stolen you may not be the only victim. After all, the thief

has no vested interest in your car. Most stolen vehicles are driven by people who have outstanding warrants, suspended licenses or are driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Law enforcement estimates that up to 80 to 90% of vehicle thefts are drug related.

The driver of a stolen car is frequently nervous and inattentive. He may have just committed a crime or is about to commit another crime, leading to the danger of crashing into innocent victims. Frequently, police car chases involve thieves driving stolen cars.

A common scenario includes a theft ring of about 15 people who rents an inexpensive motel room. They deal and/or use drugs at the hotel. They plan some sort of criminal activity such as stealing mail. Then they steal one or more cars and then steal the mail, divide stolen checks amongst

themselves, alter them, then cash them. They buy some drugs with the cash. Then they start all over again.

Other reasons cars are stolen include joyriding, transportation to get from A to B, sell the vehicle, sell it's parts, keep the vehicle (changing the



*A Crime Prevention Alliance member shows how easily and quietly thieves can break into a car and steal a purse.*

color, plates, etc.).



## Grabbing Last Minute Item— Car & Child Stolen

*Recently, a Snohomish County mother forgot something in her apartment. Her child was already buckled into the car seat. She left the keys in the car and dashed in to grab her needed item. By the time she returned, the thief was driving the car away with the child inside. Police were eventually able to safely recover the child and the car after chasing the thief.*

## Moving to the NW— Losing All of His Possessions

*Last summer, a young man was moving ALL of his personal and household belongings to the NW from Georgia, crammed into his car. He parked his car outside the 24-hour-attended office of a motel. By morning, his car and all of its belongings had vanished (\$16,000 worth), none covered by insurance.*

# Car Theft/Prowls— How They Get In

80-85% of car thieves are amateurs looking for an easy crime of opportunity. They look for cars that they think will be easy to enter and start quickly. They do not want to get caught, so they will not invest a lot of time to get into the car. Also, since they do not want to get caught, they want to be as quiet as possible and they do not want to be observed.

According to interviews with actual car thieves, their favorite methods of entering cars includes entering/taking unlocked cars (or cars already running), punching locks, breaking windows, jimmying locks (with skeleton keys, slim jims, etc.). Amazingly, many cars are stolen simply by towing them away (turning your wheels sharply after parking discourages this).

20% of all stolen cars are a result of people leaving their keys in the ignition. People “run into a convenience store on a quick errand” or warm up their cars on a cold morning! Some car thieves hang out in parking lots looking for people to leave their keys in the car.

Older cars (early 1980’s to mid 1990’s) are more popular to steal. They have fewer built-in theft deterrents.

Car prowlers are not always picky about what they take. Drug users commonly look for anything they can trade for drugs. This includes food and used clothing. Car prowlers will often pass up expensive stereos in cars that are well protected for cheaper stereos that

they can steal easily. Anything visible in your car is fair game. If a car prowler sees it, he is liable to take it!

So, a typical car thief is looking for a car that he can easily enter because he knows that it is unlocked, or it is running, or he can quickly break a window or break a lock in a place that no one can see or hear him.

A typical car prowler is looking for a car that he can see has something of value that he can easily reach by opening the door or breaking a window where he will not be observed.

## Warm Up Your Car— Give It To a Car Thief

*With the cold weather that we experience in the winter months many people start their cars and let them run for a few minutes to warm up while they duck into the house to finish their coffee before they leave for work in the morning.*

*This is an open invitation to a car thief. What better target! Not only are the keys in the car, the car is running!*

*If you warm up your car, stay with it. Never leave your keys in the car or leave it running unattended.*



## Car Theft/Prowls– *Making It Harder*

To protect your car and any valuables that you might have in your car your technique will be to make it so difficult for a car thief that he will move on to someone else's car.

The National Insurance Crime Bureau recommends a layered approach when deciding how to protect your car. Each layer adds more difficulty for a thief to gain control of your car or its contents. How many layers that you apply will depend on the level of car theft/car prowls where you take and store your car and how important it is to you not to have your car or its contents stolen.

### **Layer 1– Common sense, no cost:**

This is your base point for prevention. The simplest and cheapest things you can do.

- Take your keys with you.
- If detachable, take your stereo faceplate with you.
- Close your windows.
- DO NOT leave any property in your car!
- Park in a well lit, populated area or in an attended lot.
- Lock your car!

**Layer 2– Warning Device:** A visible or audible device that tells thieves your car is protected.

- A steering wheel locking device.
- A brake lock; brakes are a very strong part of your car.

- Extra hood and trunk pins (about \$35 each).
- A blinking LED light (about \$45) indicating the presence of an alarm system.
- Theft deterrent decals.
- A starter disabler (about \$50).
- Wheel locks.
- Identification markers in or on the vehicle.
- Window etching.

### **Layer 3– Immobilization Device:**

This is a device that prevents thieves from bypassing your ignition and hot-wiring your car.

- Smart keys– having computer chips in them.
- Fuse cut-offs.
- Kill switches.
- Starter, ignition and fuel disablers.

**Layer 4– Tracking Device:** This is the last resort. When everything else fails a tracking device (like LoJack) allows police to find your car should it be stolen.

Obviously, the more layers that you use, the more expensive securing your car becomes. You need to be aware of how serious the car theft problem is in your neighborhood, where you work and where you shop. Then you can decide how far you need to go to protect your car.

### Do You Have a Car Remote?– *Beware*

*If you have one of those “wonderful” remote car locks for your car, be careful in the mall parking lot.*

- *When you leave your car, lock it the old fashioned way, with the key in the lock, don't use the remote. The bad guys use scanners to pick up your remote's frequency, and then open your car with their own remotes.*
- *Keep your keys safe. If you lose your keys, you lose your car. With your remote, the bad guys can use the panic button to easily find your car.*



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Everett, WA 98201

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## Operation Backpack– Helping Young Victims of Meth

Snohomish County Sheriff’s Deputies frequently shut down methamphetamine production operations in our county. Often meth labs are located in average homes.

About half of the meth labs in homes have children present. Due to the highly toxic nature of meth production the homes have to undergo an expensive cleaning and their contents are thrown out. If children are present, they lose their toys, clothing, personal necessities, bed linens, favorite teddy bear and all the comforts of home. This forced disruption in the children’s life causes them to suffer trauma and confusion.

In an effort to help these children the Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office in

conjunction with the Snohomish County Methamphetamine Action Group has begun Operation Backpack. The idea is to give the child found in a meth lab a backpack containing toys, personal items and clothing to help them get a start in life after their meth lab experience.

In order to provide the backpacks, the Sheriff’s Office and the Action Group needs donations. If you would like to contribute make your check out to Youth Meth Summit and send it to:

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