



PARTNERS IN CRIME PREVENTION

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SNOCAT— SNOHOMISH COUNTY AUTO THEFT TASK FORCE

In October 2008, the Snohomish County Auto Theft Task Force (SNOCAT) began to concentrate on catching car thieves in Snohomish County.

The task force began as a result of state legislation passed in 2007. This legislation stiffened penalties for car theft and created the Washington Auto Theft Authority (WATPA) which deals with education, prevention, law enforcement, investigation, prosecution and confinement issues related to car theft.

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

Car thefts are up.

Car thieves from 3 to 4 years ago have done their time and are being released. Many are up to their old tricks. Also, more car thieves are hooked on heroin and need the money they get from car theft.

In 2014, SNOCAT:

- Recovered 160 vehicles
- The total value of recovered vehicles was \$1,823,496
- Value of vehicles- \$1,446,172
- Value of equipment- \$272,524
- Value of vehicle parts- \$104,800.

The Assistant Deputy Prosecutor assigned to the task force filed 113 cases. Of those, courts convicted 103 with an average sentence of 27.4 months in prison.



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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 of device.*
- *Install an alarm system with a kill switch.*
- *Install a locking fuel cap.*
- *Store 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.*

AUTO THEFT- THREE BASIC TYPES

Car thieves have more than one way to take a car. The most obvious and publicized is breaking into a vehicle on the street or parking lot and driving away with it. But car thieves can steal a car from at least three sources.

1. **Theft off the street.** This is the type of car theft that we hear about the most. Your car is parked on the street, in your driveway or in a parking lot, someone breaks into it, and drives away. Typically, the car thief wants a joy ride or needs transportation to another area to do a burglary or buy or sell drugs.

Most often the thief uses a shaved key to jiggle open the door lock, especially on certain 1990's era cars. Car thieves can also check to see if a door is unlocked. Many car owners don't lock their car doors. And car thieves can break a window to enter a car that they want to steal.

- 2, **Theft from car dealers.** Theft from car dealers has received publicity in recent months in the press. This often requires the car thief to find where the car keys are stored then take the cars that match the keys that they have taken.
3. **Title washing.** Title washing often entails obtaining a car title then

processing it like the car has been sold to the car thief. Many people keep the title to their cars in their cars, not in a safe place like a safety deposit box or a safe at home.

Often, a car thief will break into car and look for the car title in the glove compartment. If he finds it, he will take it away, forge the owner's signature, processes the title as a sale, then steal the car. At the time of the first break in, it looks like a car prowler when nothing was taken. When the car is stolen, deputies are often put in the position of adding insult to injury when they tell the owner that he or she does not own the car, that state records show they sold it to the thief.

The best way to avoid this situation is to secure your car title(s) in a safety deposit box or your safe at home. Never leave a car title in your car!

AUTO THEFT- TECHNOLOGY AND CAR REGISTRATIONS

Technology can protect your car from theft. And it can help a thief take your car from you.

Lojack. Lojack is a device that has been in the market place for several years. It is a transmitter that transmits a signal so that local law enforcement agencies can find a stolen car.

SNOCAT recovers a fair number of stolen cars with Lojack each year.

The device is hidden in your car by an approved Lojack technician. If your car is stolen, file a report with the local police department where it was stolen. When the report is recorded on a national stolen car database, your Lojack device will be activated. It will then send a signal to receivers in patrol cars allowing them to find your car.

Scanner Boxes. For several years there have been reports of car prowlers using handheld devices that can pick up the signal of a car remote. The technology was first seen in California and the National Insurance Crime Bureau has recently published warnings of its existence.

The scenario is that the car prowler will hang out in a large parking lot picking up the code from a nearby key fob. When the car owner is out of the area, the car prowler sends the code that he had collected opening the car doors. He then can take anything that is left in the car, cell phone, laptop/tablet, mail, car registration.

SNOCAT has yet to see devices similar to this being used in Snohomish County. However, steps you can take to defeat this piece of technology include:

- Manually lock your vehicle when you leave it, not using your key fob. This way a car prowler cannot collect your car's code. You can use your key fob to open your car when you return to it, since you will be with the car. Car prowlers want to rummage through your car when no one is around.
- Don't leave anything in view in your car, including portable GPS's and their suction cup holders.

Registration. Over the past few years, car prowlers have broken into cars to look at or take the car registration. This document is a wealth of information for ID theft or burglary while you are away from your home.

SNOCAT recommends that you either block out the address on your registration and your proof of insurance, keep those documents in your wallet or purse or take a picture of both documents (showing your signature on the registration) to the officer or deputy.

AUTO THEFT- SHAVED KEYS, 1990'S CARS, BIGGEST MISTAKES

- *The most common method of entering a car that car thieves use is with shaved keys that can be jiggled to unlock the car.*
- *1990's cars, such as Hondas, are the easiest to enter with a shaved key.*
- *The biggest mistakes that people make are to leave their doors unlocked, cars running while they are away from their cars, and leaving items in view inside the car.*

HEAVY MACHINERY THEFT- SNOCAT ALSO INVESTIGATES

SNOCAT also investigates heavy machinery theft. Securing and recovering heavy machinery has its own unique problems.

Construction sites are often difficult to secure. The location of a construction site might preclude the use of fencing, lighting and other security measures. Equipment is often left alone on the site overnight, making it easy for it to be stolen.

Also, unlike cars, trucks, trailers and boats, heavy equipment is not registered with the state. This makes it difficult for jurisdictions to check for the correct ownership of a piece of equipment, making it easier for thieves to avoid prosecution.

Heavy equipment can be critical for a contractor's business. The loss of one piece of equipment can delay a project and/or put a contractor out of business.

According to the 2013 Theft Report by the National Equipment Register and the National Insurance Crime Bureau:

Compared to vandalism, fire damage, collision, and acts of nature, "Theft is the most frequent cause of loss, but it is also the type of loss that good prevention most dramatically affects."

In 2013, there were 11,486 reports of heavy equipment theft nationwide. Only 21% of stolen equipment was recovered.

Work site security is critical. Some ways to prevent heavy equipment theft include:

- Make an inventory of all heavy equipment including make, model, serial numbers/VIN's and pictures. If your equipment is stolen, you can provide this information to police.
- Mark all heavy equipment with your company's logo in clearly visible places. Your logo marks the equipment as yours, and will discourage most thieves.
- When parking the equipment at night, take the keys with you and parked the equipment in a way that makes it difficult to drive away easily.
- Consider fencing and a locked gate if possible.
- Consider alarms and/or cameras if appropriate.
- Contact neighbors to the construction site, both residential and business, and ask for their help to watching over the site and to call 911 if they see or hear anything suspicious.
- Attach a fleet management GPS system to heavy equipment such as Lojack or John Deere JD Track.
- Participate in the National Equipment Register (NER). NER provides a national stolen heavy equipment database that can be accessed by local law enforcement agencies and insurance companies.

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SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRIME PREVENTION WEB PAGE:

<http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/289/Crime-Prevention>

NEWSLETTER INFO

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If you have questions regarding this newsletter or any articles that appear in it, please contact the editor at neighborhoodwatch@snoco.org

TIP LINES



Snohomish County Sheriff's Office: 425-388-3845

Online Tips: <http://snohomishcountywa.gov/303/Anonymous-Tips>

Crime Stoppers of Puget Sound: 1-800-222-8477