

Crime Prevention Article #2: Vehicle Theft and Theft from Vehicles (Car Prowling)

This is the second installment of a 12 part series on Crime Prevention for the Drayton Valley area, starting in April 2016 and wrapping up in March 2017. The Drayton Valley RCMP is committed to assisting this community, and the intent of this series is to educate and inform the public on property crime, and what to do when you become a victim of it. While these tips may not solve all of your crime issues in the area, these tips will go a long way in assisting the investigators of your local Detachment in hopefully either recovering property and/or detecting the culprits involved in these crimes.

Part #2: **Vehicle Theft and Theft from Vehicles (Car Prowling)**

Vehicle Theft is an ongoing concern not only in this area but for the province as well. According to Stats Canada in 2014, rates of Police-reported motor vehicle thefts were highest in Alberta at 402 per 100,000 population. In the Drayton Valley Detachment policing area for 2015, there was an aggregate total of 165 reported Vehicle thefts for the Town and Brazeau County. Of those vehicles 144 were recovered, with the rest still outstanding, destroyed or other. Vehicle theft is normally a crime of opportunity, and a vehicle can normally be stolen within 60 seconds by a skilled criminal.

Some suggestions to issues we run across are as follows:

1. **Remove your keys, lock the doors and roll up the windows of your vehicle.** Believe it or not, Police tend to run across this issue fairly often, where keys are left in the ignition of vehicles (approximately 20% of all vehicles reported stolen in Canada), and/or vehicle doors remain unlocked and windows cracked open or rolled down. Another issue in this area is also keeping a spare set of keys inside the vehicle or in a hiding spot- criminals have caught on to the usual locations where these are kept. There have also been cases where thieves have stolen keys from convenient locations, such as in the garage or near the front door and taken the vehicle. The best way to view your keys to your vehicle is like a bank card- keep it on your person at all times.
2. **Utilize a visible theft device.** More often than not a thief who sees something like a club theft deterrent or an alarm will usually pass on that vehicle. The key for most thieves is not being detected while attempting to take a vehicle. The more time a criminal has to spend trying to steal your vehicle the less likely they will attempt it. Parking in a well lit area is also a good idea as it is more difficult for criminals to conceal what they are doing. If you have a vehicle parked outside consider using a motion sensor to light up if someone comes near your vehicle.
3. **Don't leave your vehicle running unattended.** A quick stop to the convenience store, or running into the post office to get the mail, and when you come back out your vehicle is gone. Shut off your vehicle, secure it, and then conduct your business. Small children should not be left alone in vehicles as there have been cases in Alberta where vehicles have been stolen and kids were in the backseat- any parents' worst nightmare.
4. **Don't leave valuables in your car.** I will expand more on this with the theft from vehicles portion of this article, but having valuables in plain view makes your vehicle a target for theft.

Crime Prevention Article #2: Vehicle Theft and Theft from Vehicles (Car Prowling)

- 5. Consider some sort of tracking device to be installed.** Several private companies offer tracking services for owners of vehicles so they can assist the Police in finding their vehicle. There is usually a monthly fee associated for this service. There are also electronic disabling devices available that can be utilized to assist with preventing a theft of your vehicle.
- 6. Park in your garage.** Simply put, parking a vehicle in a garage with the doors locked and the garage locked makes it that much harder for a thief to get at your vehicle. If you are going away for a period of time consider taking the battery out of the vehicle so it cannot be started.

The next part of this is focused on theft from vehicles. Commonly these types of thefts occur during the night, usually from around 10 P.M. to around 4 A.M. Our Detachment has received multiple calls for service the next morning after a spree of these types of thefts. A great deal are not reported and I would encourage all incidents to be reported to the Police.

Normally the way these types of thefts occur is again, based on opportunity. Criminals going vehicle door to vehicle door, checking to see if the doors are locked or not. Looking inside of vehicles for valuables. Some of the most common items stolen are smartphones, work tools, sunglasses, loose change, GPS units, laptops, iPods, garage door openers or keys and personal info. Usually these perpetrators are on foot or using a bicycle and will have some sort of bag like a backpack with them, and may have a lookout in case of Police presence.

This type of crime is usually one of the easiest to prevent and simply takes some change in how you do things. Some suggestions to reduce the likelihood of theft from your vehicle are:

- 1. Secure your vehicle.** As noted earlier, this is the first and most important step to preventing theft of items from your vehicle. If the thief can't get in easily, they are likely to move on.
- 2. Keep it clean inside.** Evidence of things like chargers, money, sunglasses or other valuables laying in plain view make your vehicle a target. As mentioned earlier, keep things out of sight and the best practice is to take all of your valuables with you. If the thief believes they have nothing to take, they are unlikely to break a window or defeat a lock to get in.
- 3. Remove any garage door openers.** A thief who takes this can gain access to your garage and very possibly your home. Taking this out of your vehicle when not occupied is just a good habit to get into.
- 4. Get to know the neighbourhood you live in.** People recognize when someone in their area is out of place. Patterns of who should be in an area comes after a while and you get to know who lives where. Get to know your neighbours. If you see someone who isn't from around there acting out of place or doing suspicious behavior like checking doors call the Police immediately.

Lastly, it has happened in the past where a member of the public has located a cache of stolen items secreted under a bush or placed somewhere out of sight. If you do, please do not touch it and call Police to collect it. Keep your eyes on the area until Police attend as it is possible the offender may come back to collect it.

Crime Prevention Article #2: Vehicle Theft and Theft from Vehicles (Car Prowling)

Next Month, in June 2016, we will discuss the topic, "I've just found out my house/shed/garage/outbuilding been broken into- what do I do." This is key in assisting your local RCMP in collecting evidence and possibly tying a scene to an offender. More to come next month.

Yours in Service,

S/Sgt. M.F. Callihoo
Detachment Commander
Drayton Valley RCMPC