

Manitobans trying, but could do more to prevent auto theft

Get rid of the “come in and browse” sign: 37 per cent leave valuables or keys in plain view

Back in May we talked about how 9,000 vehicles are stolen each year in Manitoba, costing MPI (which is ultimately you, Mr. or Ms. Policyholder), roughly \$20 million annually.

Since that time MPI has been keeping its “finger” on the pulse of the province, measuring your understanding of the auto theft problem, and monitoring what’s really going on out there.

That’s what made the recent Auto Theft Field Study so interesting.

The field study was coordinated with the University of Manitoba Security Services, Winnipeg Citizens on Patrol (COP), the Downtown BIZ Watch, the Department of Justice, Polo Park, Garden City, Kildonan Place, Grant Park and St. Vital Shopping Centres, and Imperial Parking. And lastly, but certainly not least, it was carried out by 48 volunteers who spent their free time peering into car windows to see if



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drivers really were “target hardening” their vehicles.

In May, we surveyed motorists from all over Manitoba, and here’s what you told us about auto theft:

- 18 per cent reported your car had been vandalized
- 16 per cent said your car had been broken into, and something stolen
- 7 per cent said the “something stolen” had been your car

When we asked you what you thought were the best deterrents to theft, you said:

- Using a steering wheel lock (55%)
- Locking your doors (35%)
- Installing a car alarm (28%)

Another 40 per cent indicated they were interested in participating in the CAT program (more on that later).

And finally, when we asked you what you actually did to prevent auto theft, you said:

- Parking in lit areas at night (65%)
- Using a steering wheel lock (31%)
- Installing a car alarm (13%)

So, our 48 volunteers went out to see if you were doing what our surveys said you were. They poked around car lots across Winnipeg, checking more than 16,000 vehicles for “target hardening.” And they came up with some interesting numbers.

First, more than 37 per cent of the checked vehicles displayed either money or possessions in plain view. Folks, that’s not target hardening. You might as well hang a sign on your rear window that says, “come in and browse.”

Just more than six per cent of motorists had left their keys or their garage door openers in their vehicles,

again inviting unwanted guests. And slightly more than eight per cent had left either their windows open or their doors unlocked.

And, while more than half of the phone survey participants said a steering wheel lock was the way to go, only six per cent of checked vehicles actually had one. (And remember, dear readers, they don’t work unless they are actually ON the steering wheel.) Car alarms came in at 3.6 per cent.

Remember my reference to the CAT program a bit earlier? While 40 per cent of those surveyed indicated an interest in the program, only six per cent of the vehicles our volunteers checked displayed the CAT sticker.

You know, before you get the impression that it’s all gloomy, I’d like to point out that for the most part Manitobans are trying to deter auto theft.

Here’s a refresher:

- Park in well-lit areas
- Close windows and lock doors

- Use anti-theft devices
- Take your keys and hide your possessions
- Avoid leaving your vehicle unattended while it is running
- Join the Combat Auto Theft (CAT) program

CAT (Combat Auto Theft) is a free vehicle identification program. Putting a CAT decal in your window indicates that your car isn’t normally driven in the wee hours of the morning (when most vehicles are stolen), alerting police to investigate.

To participate, simply register your vehicle with any Autopac Claim Centre, Autopac broker or your police department.

Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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