

Car Prowl Prevention

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Promoting a culture of civic engagement by connecting and supporting residents and visitors to Westville working together and with Westville SAPS to build inclusive, safe and livable neighborhoods and communities.

Theft from vehicle, also known as car prowling, is the unlawful taking of motor vehicle contents or parts. Car prowls are crimes of opportunity. An offender makes a split second decision to break into a vehicle based on a perception that there are items of value in that vehicle, therefore making the potential payoff worth the risk.

This crime is consistently one of the top reported crimes in South Africa during the last five years. Although there is no profile of a typical car prowler, a number of offenders break into vehicles to support drug addictions. One offender, in Portland, Oregon broke into 15-20 vehicles per day at the height of his drug addiction.

A car prowling can be completed in a minute or less, and a significant number of these crimes occur between the hours of 10:00 pm to 4:00 am.

Methods of entry include: entering into the vehicle through an unlocked door, breaking a window, or using a wedge to gain access. The offender often wears a backpack or bag to transport stolen items.

Items frequently stolen include GPS systems, laptops, electronic devices, CDs, mail/bills, documents with personal information, purses/wallets, luggage, gym bags, money, cell phones, insurance cards, vehicle licence, and shopping bags.

Steps to Car Prowl Prevention

The good news is that car prowls are one of the easiest crimes to reduce with increased awareness and a change in habits. The following preventive measures will reduce the chances of being the target of a car prowling:

Keep the interior of your car "showroom" clean. Never leave valuables, including bags, purses, wallets, briefcases, laptops, cell phones, loose change or anything that may appear valuable to a thief in plain view.

Remove garage door openers, key cards, and house or work keys from the car so a car prowler cannot gain access to your home.

Don't store or leave credit cards, identification or personal information in your glove box or anywhere in your car.

If you have to leave valuables in your car, put them in the trunk before you get to your destination.

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Car prowls are a gateway to other crime like:

Identity Theft

Burglaries

Vehicle Theft

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What to Do if Your Car is Broken Into

If your car is broken into, report the crime to the police. If it's a crime in progress, contact **10111**. If not, contact the non-emergency number **031 267 7346** (**Westville SAPS**) to report the incident. Take note of any details of the suspects, vehicles, and or activities, and share your observations with the police.

If the thief is caught and arrested, request to pursue charges against the individual(s). Ensure your case is aggressively pursued by contacting the Westville SAPS Office: (031) 267 7340 or (031) 267 7341 or (031) 267 7346 or (031) 267 7347 or (031) 267 7348, to learn the necessary steps.

How to Work Together as Neighbours

One of the most important things is to always report suspicious activity to the Westville SAPS Careline at 082 418 1321 and crimes in progress to 10111. Encourage your neighbours to keep an eye out for any suspicious activity, and to keep their cars clear of items. One car prowler stated that if a neighborhood consistently kept their vehicles free of valuables, he would move on to another neighborhood.

Please share the information that you've read in this brochure with your neighbors and make sure to let them know if you or any of your neighbors have been a car prowler victim. A good way to share the information with neighbors is through your Neighborhood Watch or Foot Patrol. If you are interested in organizing one, contact your Crime Prevention Coordinator, Constable Stephen Clark on 031 2677346 for more information on how to get started.

Before leaving your parked car, always remove the keys, roll up the windows, lock the car and set the alarm (if you have one).

If possible, store your car in a closed and locked garage. If your car is stored in a carport or parked near your house, leave your exterior home lights on throughout the night.

Consider replacing the light fixture closest to your car with a motion detector unit. Motion detectors are good psychological deterrents, causing the thief to think that someone has seen them when the light comes on. Additionally, the light makes the prowler or thief more visible.

Create visibility. If you park on the street, choose a well-lit, open space even if it means adding additional street or yard lighting. Trim back trees or bushes that block your view of your vehicle.

Park in busy, well-lit areas. Avoid parking near anything that limits visibility like dumpsters, large vans or trucks, or wooded areas.

Use a mechanical locking device such as a club that locks to the steering wheel, column, or brake to deter car theft.

Keep your keys with you; avoid putting keys in "hiding places."

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Avoid leaving your vehicle in unattended parking lots for long periods of time.

When you pay to park in a lot or garage, leave just the ignition key with the attendant if it is normal for the attendant to park the car. Make sure no personal information is attached. Do the same when you take your car in for repairs.

Carry the licence and insurance card with you when you leave your vehicle. NOTE: Make sure you have these items with you when you return.

Operating the vehicle without these documents is against the law.

Investigate security systems if you live in a high theft area or drive an automobile that is an attractive target for thieves. You may get a discount on your auto insurance.

Organise a Neighborhood Watch. Get to know your neighbors; share contact information – phone numbers, emails – and look out for each other. The people who live on your block are the most likely to recognise suspicious people or suspicious activity.

Be observant when you exit or enter your parked vehicle, stop and take a look around the area.

Report any suspicious activity to the police.