

PS COMMITTEE #4  
February 25, 2010

**MEMORANDUM**

February 22, 2010

TO: Public Safety Committee

FROM: Susan J. Farag, Legislative Analyst *SJF*

SUBJECT: **Update: Auto Theft Prevention Strategies and the Bait Car Program**

Today the Committee will be briefed on the Police Department's auto theft strategies as well as its use of bait cars to prevent both thefts of cars as well as thefts from cars in the County. The following are expected to brief the Committee:

Chief Thomas Manger, Police Department  
Assistant Chief Wayne Jerman, Police Department  
Sgt. Gerry McFarland, Police Department

**AUTO THEFTS IN THE COUNTY**

Auto thefts have declined significantly over the past two years. In 2007, there were 2,483 auto thefts, compared to 2,197 in 2008 and 1,685 in 2009. In comparison, in 2008 Prince George's County had over 9,700 thefts, Baltimore City over 5,500, and Baltimore County over 2,900. Information on Montgomery County's website indicates that about 70% of stolen autos are recovered and 50% are recovered in the first 30 days.

Theft from autos has also become a significant issue, with 8,495 thefts from autos (including thefts of auto parts) in 2008 and 8,183 thefts from autos in 2009.

## THE COUNTY'S AUTO THEFT PREVENTION STRATEGIES

According to the Department, auto theft patterns have changed slightly over the past several years due primarily to the use of better theft protection technology built into newer vehicles. The two major types of auto thieves are those who steal cars just to go "joy riding," and those who steal for profit. The Department has developed different methods to deal with each.

According to the Department's website (© 1-5), a recent study was conducted by the Baltimore Regional Auto Theft Task Force looking for trends in the methods of theft, types of vehicle stolen, and the uses of theft prevention devices. The study showed that:

- 95% of the victims of auto theft did not have a theft prevention device;
- 63% had one or more doors unlocked at the time of theft; and
- 24% had keys in the ignition or in the car at the time of theft.

The County advises that our auto theft trends revealed similar results.

***Joy Riders:*** With newer cars having more built-in anti-theft measures (such as chip keys and better ignition construction), many cars manufactured in the past four or five years cannot be easily stolen by punching the ignition. Those who steal cars just to joy ride continue to steal older model cars whose ignitions can be easily punched. They do not try to steal newer model cars. These types of thefts are the largest percentage of vehicle thefts. The Department uses the bait car for these types of thefts. Between 2004 and 2008, there was one attempt theft of the vehicle and three thefts from autos. Since August 2009, there have been two auto thefts and two thefts from auto. The Department has also been using the Bait Car to address thefts from autos. The Department indicates that this is not the most effective way to catch thieves, but it brings patrol officers to the areas where thefts are occurring and helps prevent additional thefts.

***For-Profit Thieves:*** Thieves that steal for a profit have developed new ways to obtain cars and their keys:

- Fraud;
- Thefts from dealerships;
- Residential burglary with the goal of obtaining keys; and
- Breaking into cars with the specific intent to locate hidden or spare keys.

These cars are often used to commit other crimes, re-plated and resold, or shipped out of the country. In response, the Centralized Auto Theft Section (CATS) has developed a Dealership Certification Program that helps new car dealerships identify ways to improve key control, employee screening, inventory control, and reduce dealership thefts. CATS has also targeted major offenders, those responsible for numerous car thefts. The Department also works with dedicated Assistant State's Attorney staff to handle large-scale auto theft cases in both the District and Juvenile courts.

**Other Strategies:** The Department has also maintained and improved cooperation and communication among regional auto theft units to ensure prosecution of multi-jurisdictional offenders. The Department as also increased training of patrol officers, Assistant State's Attorneys, Police investigators, and investigators from other jurisdictions with the goal of reducing auto theft both in Montgomery County and regionally.

## **BAIT CARS**

Bait cars are used across the nation as decoy vehicles meant to capture auto thieves in the act. The vehicles are often equipped with GPS tracking and audio/video surveillance technology, and can be remotely monitored and controlled by law enforcement personnel. They are generally outfitted with a remote-controlled immobilizer (kill switch) that allows the police to remotely disable the engine.

The County began using a bait car in 2004. Since August 2009, bait cars have been deployed almost continually. Generally, a car is left parked and unlocked. In January 2008, the Department conducted one "sting" operation, leaving the car running and unattended. However, no one attempted to take the car. Recently, the Department began using the vehicles for theft from autos as well.

**Cost and Funding for Bait Cars:** Bait cars cost about \$4,000 to initially outfit each vehicle with proper equipment. The yearly service contract for both the equipment and software costs another \$1,350 total. Vehicle maintenance is performed through the County fleet. The primary expense is staffing needed to deploy and maintain the vehicles. It takes two people one to three hours to move vehicles.

The Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council (State funded and affiliated with the State Police) and the Maryland/DC Anti-Car Theft Committee (an Insurance Company funded group) paid all installation, training, and equipment fees through several grants. The Theft Prevention Council was the primary source of funding, and their budget has since been cut. No funding exists for the 2010 \$1,350 service contract.

**Bait Car Programs in Other Jurisdictions:** Some other local jurisdictions, like Arlington County, have more robust bait car programs. Arlington County, for example, indicates its program has cut car thefts by 56% and results in a 100% conviction rate (see article on © 6-7). Since its program's inception in 2002, the bait car has captured more than 100 car thieves. *The Committee may wish to ask Department staff why the number of theft attempts of bait cars differs so much between the County and Arlington. Are there any practices Arlington is using that we could adopt to increase the use of our bait cars?*

### **This Packet Contains the Following Attachments:**

Theft Prevention Devices – Montgomery County Police Department Website	© 1-5
"Inside the Arlington Police Bait Car," Fox 5 News (January 20, 2010)	6-7
Maryland Vehicle Theft Statistics (2008)	8-10



# Department of Police

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## Divisions/Stations — Criminal Investigations Division - Autotheft

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### Prevention Devices

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Recently a study was conducted in the Baltimore Metro area, which has experienced the highest vehicle theft rate in Maryland. The study was done by the Baltimore Regional Auto Theft Task Force and sponsored by the Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council. The purpose was to study 1000 stolen and recovered vehicles to look for trends in the method of theft, type of vehicle stolen, use of theft prevention devices etc. This study was vital to the cause of theft prevention because it proved what we had long suspected, that is that people don't do enough to protect their cars from auto theft.

The most important figures which came from this study are;

- 95% of the victims of auto theft did not have a theft prevention device;
- 63% had one or more doors unlocked at the time of theft;
- 24% had keys in the ignition or in the car at the time of theft.

A review of our own auto theft trends in Montgomery County revealed the same result.

Auto theft is a crime of opportunity in our area and the best way to stop a thief is to always lock your doors, never leave your keys in the car, and use a anti-theft prevention device.

The devices profiled below are for informational purposes and are provided as illustrative examples only. Any comments or questions should be directed to the Centralized Auto Theft Section.

### 1st Layer of Protection (Common Sense):

1. Lock all doors upon exiting the car. Remember, 63% of victims above did not.
2. Take the keys with you. DO NOT hide them in the vehicle. 24% above did not.
3. Remove all valuables from inside the car. When you step out and close the door, attempt to think like a thief for a moment. Are there any valuables *clearly visible* inside the car that make it an attractive prospect for entry and theft?
4. Keep the registration in your wallet or purse rather than in the vehicle. Thieves can use this for re-title activities or to represent themselves as you!



5. Park in a well lit and populated area. Thieves crave concealment, so don't make it easy for them to target you.
6. Locking steering wheel - Most vehicles have steering wheel locks when the wheel is turned to a certain degree.

### 2nd Layer of Protection:(Use an Anti-Theft Device)

Unfortunately most vehicles do not come manufactured with reliable anti-theft devices. Therefore it is left to the buyer to fill this protection gap. The following devices are strongly recommended by the Montgomery County Department of Police.

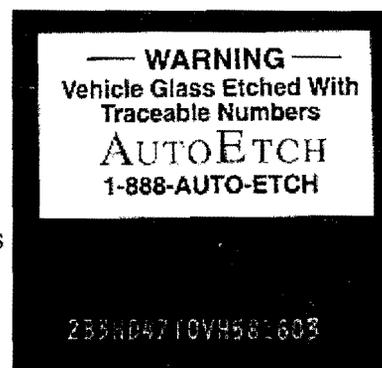
- **Use a visible anti-theft device (about \$30-50).** Popular devices in this category are similar to the steering lock device pictured above. They are effective because they lock the steering wheel in a fixed position so the vehicle cannot be driven. You may have seen the television news program last year that did a story on how these devices can be defeated. The program demonstrated how the device can be defeated by either punching out the lock or cutting the steering wheel to remove it. You can prevent this from happening by putting the steering lock device on backwards. Place the device on the inside of the steering wheel with the lock facing the dashboard. This way the lock cannot be defeated. You will have to reach around the steering wheel to unlock the device but this is easy after you do it a few times.



To prevent your steering wheel from being cut, use a shield attachment which is an add-on to the steering wheel locking device. One final note, 95% of our auto theft victims did not have a theft prevention device in or attached to the vehicle. Thieves want the path of least resistance and two or three of those cars have one or more doors unlocked and the perhaps the keys were left in the vehicle. Those are the cars that will be stolen. These devices can be purchased at most automotive and retail stores.

### *ALWAYS USE YOUR DEVICE!!*

- **Glass Etching** provides an affordable means for discouraging thieves from stealing your vehicle. Glass etching involves engraving all the windows of a vehicle with that vehicles VIN number. The idea here is that thieves won't steal a vehicle that has been etched because all of the etched glass must be replaced with new glass, which is expensive and time consuming. This is especially true in cases where thieves seek to re-plate (the replacement of a stolen vehicles correct VIN number with fraudulent VIN numbers in order to re-title and sell the vehicle) the car or send it to a chop shop. A chop shop won't buy marked vehicles stolen by an amateur or careless "pro". Vehicle theft is a business to them and an etched vehicle is just not worth the risk.



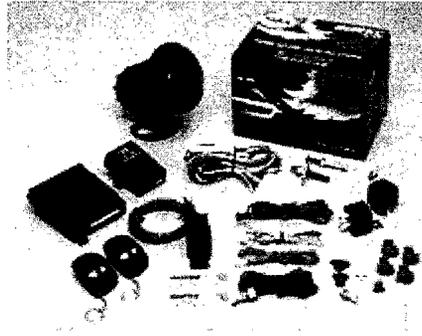
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In a three year study, Kentucky State Police etched over 125,000 vehicles. Only three of the vehicles were stolen. The Hanover Insurance Company etching program went from a 50% recovery rate before implementation, to over a 90% recovery rate. A Connecticut company etched over 225,000 vehicles over a 5 year period and only 57 vehicles were declared a total loss due to theft. This is a passive security device that won't malfunction and is an effective, inexpensive way to stop the professional thief.

Call the Centralized Auto Theft Section's office at 240-773-6370 for more information.

### 3rd Layer of Protection:

1. **Alarm systems** can be effective, but unfortunately are often ignored (\$100-\$900). There are many different types of alarm systems available to the consumer. The basic alarm systems are affordable and are designed go off if someone opens a door or even touches the car while the system is activated. They often come with a dash board mounted LED warning light to notify would be thieves that the car is equipped with an alarm system.



2. **Electronic keys.** An Electronic key is one that is equipped with a small computer chip which interfaces with a second chip in the ignition mechanism. The second chip then sends a signal to a third chip located in the vehicles main computer panel which controls the electrical system and the flow of fuel to the engine. If the proper key is not inserted in the ignition, the vehicle simply will not start. It doesn't matter if the ignition is punched out or if the steering column is cracked. The car is completely disabled without the key. The only way to take a vehicle equipped with this system is to pull it onto a flat bed truck and drive it away. The system can be defeated but it is a very time consuming process which requires a level of sophistication not found in your typical auto thief. Most new cars are now equipped with the "chip" in the key. Ask the dealership about this before you purchase your new vehicle. If they inform you that you must come to the dealership to get a key made, then your keys are equipped with the "chip".
3. **Kill switches or Ignition interrupt.** Our strongest recommendation is that all vehicles be protected by an ignition interrupt device. By using a hidden switch or special key, Ignition interrupt devices prevent almost all auto theft. We strongly urge you to have one installed. Kill switches, vehicle immobilizers, interrupts, and fuse cut-off devices can be purchased from private vehicle security shops. Private firms offer a wide array of anti theft systems and some are very sophisticated. An electronic key system can be installed on any vehicle and if you wish greater protection a wide array of options are available through these vehicle security firms. Listed below are some of the options that

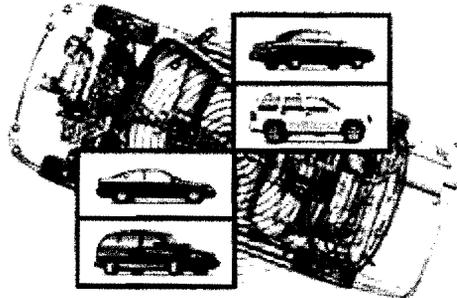
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may be available:

- Starter /Fuel Interrupt- requires special key or keypad to start car.
- Remote engine starter/disabler-owner can perform functions with hand held remote.
- Ignition-controlled door lock safety system-doors lock/unlock automatically.
- Programmable passive arming 30 sec after last door is closed.
- Remote keyless entry.
- Built-in perimeter sensing.
- Paging capabilities to notify you if alarm is activated.
- Digital keypad starter disable.
- Smart Valet capabilities allow valet to park vehicle without learning secret codes.
- Tilt sensors.

#### 4th Layer of Protection:

- **Stolen vehicle recovery systems** are also effective also. New technologies are being applied in products for vehicle recovery via tracking systems. One of the current commercial products is the Lojack Tracking System. It is a stolen vehicle locator system which allows police to find stolen vehicles equipped with the Lojack transmitter. This transmitter is hidden within the vehicle and is activated once the vehicle is reported stolen to the police.



The police department enters the vehicle information into the NCIC computer system and Lojack accesses the information through their direct link. The electronic tracking units within police cars have an extended radius for tracking a Lojack vehicle. Once the tracking unit has locked onto a Lojack vehicle, it displays a numeric code which communications personnel use to determine the stolen vehicle information. That information is then broadcast to all units. Police officers in vehicles equipped with tracking receivers, knowing the description of the vehicle, then work to find its location. Some companies, such as Lojack, guarantee that your car will be recovered within 24 hrs or you will receive a full refund for the cost of the unit. Lojack has been in the Washington area since 1994 and currently reports a 95% recovery rate with an average three hour recovery time in this area. Unfortunately, this tracking unit is not a prevention device as there are no stickers that are placed on the vehicle to warn would be thieves that the car is equipped with the device. Rather, Lojack is advertised as a stolen vehicle recovery device. Lojack can be purchased only through authorized car dealerships and directly from Lojack. You can visit the the Lojack website at [www.lojack.com](http://www.lojack.com) .

- **GPS or Ground Positioning Satellite systems** are an emerging technology that allow monitoring companies and/or the police to pin-point the exact location of your vehicle at all times (about \$1900). This technology can give the monitoring company and/or the police the ability to control most electrical aspects of your vehicle. First, the unit is installed in the prospective customers vehicle. A standard cellular telephone mount and

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headset are installed. When the owner starts the car he/she must enter a 4 digit code into the cellular telephone within three minutes. If that code is not entered, the central monitoring center (much like a home alarm) will place a call to the vehicle to verify who is driving the car. If the proper password or code is not given to the monitoring center, then action will be taken based on the predefined wishes of the owner. The central monitoring center may stop the engine, lock the doors, sound the horn, cause the lights to flash and notify the police. Typically, the owner predefines that the engine will be stopped at a speed of 10 mph or less and the police will be notified as to the exact location of the vehicle for further investigation.

Some other features that these systems offer include: free 24hr road service for directions, breakdowns, accidents etc, panic button that can be secretly activated by the driver in the event of a medical emergency or other emergency, monitoring center can unlock your car if you have locked your keys in the car or turn your lights off if you have left them on and your battery charge is getting low; insurance discounts of up to 30% for purchasing this system; coverage includes all 50 states, Alaska and Hawaii. This is an emerging technology and as with cell phones and computers, the cost will drop over the next three to five years. Eventually this system will likely come as standard equipment with most cars (Cadillac North Star). Three companies currently offering this system are ATX Research Inc., Mobi TEL Inc., and Direct Electronics Inc.

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# Inside the Arlington Police Bait Car

## FOX 5 gets first-hand look at crimefighting tool

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By ROBY CHAVEZ/myfoxdc

ARLINGTON, Va. - You've seen the video: Criminals caught on camera stealing cars. For the first time, FOX 5 goes where only car thieves have gone before-- inside the Arlington Police bait car.

It's a tool that's drastically cut auto thefts by 56 percent. The car doesn't just snatch the thief. It also gives police inside information on how they operate.

In one of the most recent videos, a convicted car thief jumps over the seat and hops behind the wheel wearing gloves. Another man is seen driving a car away. He is stealing it in broad daylight.

Others are seen inside the car at night pulling out a GPS and laughing, saying, "This is easy!"

All of them think no one is watching, and quickly fall for the bait.

In one video with five juveniles inside, a youngster yells, "My doors won't open. They don't open. It won't open. We're bagged son."

Police then order them out of the car. Eventually, all are caught in the trap of the bait car.

"The intelligence we gather watching these crimes in progress helps our patrol units and specialized units learn how these crimes are committed," said Detective Chris Dengeles of the Arlington Police Auto Theft Unit.

Arlington Police watch it all unfold from several locations, like from the street and inside a huge communications command center. The best point of view comes from inside the car, where Arlington Police have been using a hidden camera for nearly eight years.

As police review the video tape, Dengeles says, "He seems to be smiling. They're pretty happy. It's a good take for the night. It's amazing how young some of them are."

On this night with screwdrivers in hands, kiddie car thieves show their hand on how they work.

"That's why they come so deep-- five in a car-- because they will spread out and get more vehicles and take out wherever they are going to go," said Det. Dengeles.

In one video taken during a hot summer day, one man wears gloves. Police quickly deduce it's why they're not getting finger prints off the hot cars.

"His intention is to take back to D.C., dump it and start process all over again. Gloves are there to conceal fingerprints so we can't figure out who he is," said Detective Dengeles.

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The cameras literally put police in the driver's seat.

So how does this car work? For the first time ever, Arlington County has allowed Fox 5 inside their bait car.

"With the keys in the ignition, we're able to take off in this bait car relatively quick. We're going about 15 miles an hour. They (police) have managed to turn the car off. Right now, the engine is off and the car has no power. Once the engine is shut off there is nowhere to go. The power steering is off. The engine is off and there is no way to get out. Police lock the doors from the control room. The car is powerless. We have no option but to pull the car over," says Fox 5 reporter Roby Chavez as he drives behind the wheel to test-drive the car.

It's a very secretive tool, so police would not expose all its secrets.

As Detective Dengeles drives the bait car, he explains that criminals are able to get up to good speeds.

"Now we've just lost power. What happened is the engine has been shut off. I have no more acceleration. I have control to brake and steer but I can't escape," explains Dengeles.

The car is tracked from inside the command center and is shut down with a simple verbal command via computer.

"When it comes to a stop, it just rolls to a stop," explains Dengeles.

If you want to get out, he says, you can't-- you are locked in and there is no way to get out of the car until the command center unlocks the doors via computer.

The bait car has now captured more than 100 car thieves. At the end of every video police are heard yelling, "Hands up! Hands up now!"

The video is often amusing, but the bait car has proven a serious crime-fighting tool.

"What they say to themselves out loud is humorous, but clearly it's the gotcha moment," said Dengeles.

In one final video, a man struggles to restart the car. "Oh my God. They got me chief," says the man as police take him out of the car.

Arlington Police say no one has ever successfully stolen the bait car in Arlington. Police started with one car and now have an entire fleet.

The real payoff is in court. Prosecutors have a 100-percent conviction rate.

If there is any damage to the car, the car thief has to pay for it.

**W. Ray Presley**  
Executive Director



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Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention

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**Maryland Vehicle Theft Statistics**

Although vehicle theft is primarily a crime of opportunity, perpetrators often favor particular makes and models. The following list ranks, according to information received by the Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council, the ten most common vehicles stolen in the area of occurrence.

Maryland Statistics

Select a year to view statistics. 2008

[hide](#)

[2008 State Theft Summary Chart](#)

National Statistics

Select a year to view statistics. --Select Year--

**Baltimore Metro Area**

1. Dodge Caravan
2. Honda Accord
3. Jeep Cherokee
4. Dodge Neon
5. Honda Civic
6. Plymouth Voyager



- 7. Toyota Camry
- 8. Ford Taurus
- 9. Chevrolet Cavalier
- 10. Ford Explorer

**Washington Metro Area**

- 1. Dodge Caravan
- 2. Honda Accord
- 3. Dodge Intrepid
- 4. Dodge Stratus
- 5. Ford Taurus
- 6. Ford Crown Victoria
- 7. Jeep Cherokee
- 8. Plymouth Voyager
- 9. Honda Civic
- 10. Toyota Camry

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Questions or Comments? [Click Here](#)



<b>County</b>	<b>Vehicle Thefts</b>	<b>Total Index Offenses</b>
<b><u>Allegany</u></b>	49	2,463
<b><u>Anne Arundel</u></b>	1,581	22,233
<b><u>Baltimore</u></b>	2,940	31,980
<b><u>Baltimore City</u></b>	5,518	41,165
<b><u>Calvert</u></b>	108	2,241
<b><u>Caroline</u></b>	57	1,211
<b><u>Carroll</u></b>	124	3,253
<b><u>Cecil</u></b>	310	4,351
<b><u>Charles</u></b>	387	4,757
<b><u>Dorchester</u></b>	61	1,410
<b><u>Frederick</u></b>	239	4,973
<b><u>Garrett</u></b>	29	612
<b><u>Harford</u></b>	403	6,100
<b><u>Howard</u></b>	534	8,908
<b><u>Kent</u></b>	25	530
<b><u>Montgomery</u></b>	2,384	28,053
<b><u>Prince George's</u></b>	9,743	51,268
<b><u>Queen Anne's</u></b>	56	1,112
<b><u>Somerset</u></b>	35	798
<b><u>St. Mary's</u></b>	135	2,214
<b><u>Statewide Agencies</u></b>	33	743
<b><u>Talbot</u></b>	46	1,213

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<u>Washington</u>	246	3,623
<u>Vicomico</u>	217	1,610
<u>Worcester</u>	80	2,642

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