



HEADQUARTERS MEMORANDUM 98-21

File With: FC 618

Distribution: All

Date: 08-01-98

Subject: "Watch Your Car" Program

Beginning August 15, 1998, the Montgomery County Department of Police will begin participating in the "Watch Your Car" program administered by Maryland's Vehicle Theft Prevention Council. Citizens can participate by registering for this program designed to deter auto theft and assist in the apprehension of auto thieves. Upon registration, police will attach decals to the vehicle that indicate that police have the right to stop their vehicles between the hours of 0100 and 0500, without probable cause, to verify it is being operated by the vehicle owner or a person designated by the owner. Officers stopping vehicles displaying the sticker during the appropriate time periods should exercise caution based on the circumstances they are facing. The program does not allow the vehicle to be searched automatically. That action should be taken based on the probable cause the officer independently builds. Officers will be able to determine if, in fact, the vehicle is registered with the Watch Your Cars program through MILES by allowing officers to query MVA.

District station community policing officers and members of the Special Operations Division will assist the Central Auto Theft Team in presenting this program to citizens. Officers will register interested citizens during community meetings and other community oriented events. The registration/waiver forms that indicate owners are willing to allow their vehicles to be stopped by police, without probable cause, will be kept on file with the Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council.

This program provides police with another enforcement and prevention tool in the efforts to reduce auto theft. It has been successful in other agencies around the country, including Texas, where it has been in effect for five years. Within Montgomery County, municipal police agencies including Takoma Park, Gaithersburg City, Chevy Chase, and Rockville City will be participating as well. The Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office is in support of the program. Auto theft in Montgomery County has decreased every year since 1995 and participation should assist the department in further reducing the number of auto thefts.

A training video discussing the program will be distributed to patrol shifts in the near future. Any questions about the program can be directed to Sergeant Mitch Cunningham or PO3 Don Smith at 301-421-5445.

Carol A. Mehrling
Chief of Police

CAM/JMC/kag