

Crime Prevention Tips Preventing “CarJacking”

One of the crimes that has caught the American public’s attention in the past two decades is “CarJacking”. Legally speaking, this is classified as Robbery (or Aggravated Robbery, if a weapon or threat of a weapon is used by a criminal against a victim), but it is often referred to by the public as “CarJacking”.

Understanding CarJacking from a Criminal’s Viewpoint

- Modern vehicles are often equipped with ignition systems requiring a coded key to start the engine. These vehicles are very difficult or impossible to “hot wire”, and sometimes the only way to steal a vehicle (outside of towing) is to steal the ignition key from the vehicle’s operator.
- Thieves, often traveling in groups and in a vehicle, will eye a vehicle they want. “Impulse shopping” at its very worst, they will approach a vehicle at an traffic signal, in heavy traffic, or when a vehicle operator is entering or exiting a vehicle, and steal the vehicle. Often, these thieves use a weapon to secure control of the situation and take the vehicle.
- Gas stations and car washes are often the venue for a car jacking. Vehicle operators are distracted attending to their vehicle, and easily surprised by criminals.
- Criminals often watch ATM machines, especially drive up and drive through locations, and often at night. In many cases, criminals are able to rob victims of the cash they withdraw from the ATM as well as steal their vehicle.
- Shoppers loading packages into a vehicle are often targeted because they are distracted. A thief may escape with both the vehicle and the packages being loaded.

What You can do to help prevent from becoming a victim:

- **Parking:** Park your vehicle in a well lit area, clearly visible to the public. An attended parking lot is ideal, as criminals hate having witnesses.

- **Entering Your Vehicle:** have your keys in your hand, ready to enter. Keep your eyes moving and your head “on a swivel”; know your surroundings. Trust your instincts: If you “feel” something is wrong, turn around and leave the area. Once you reach your vehicle, unlock, quickly enter, then re-lock the doors. Get the vehicle moving as soon as you can.
- Be wary of people near your vehicle ask for directions, or ask for money to help with gas (“I’m from out of town and lost my wallet...”), or other possible distractions. They may be working with a partner, who will attempt to take your keys, and your vehicle.
- When in your vehicle and driving, keep your doors locked, and your windows rolled up.
- Drive in the center lane of a street (away from curbs and sidewalks)
- When stopping in traffic at a stop sign or stop signal, make sure you have room in front of you to maneuver and escape, if necessary. Rule of thumb: If you can’t see the rear tires of the vehicle in front of you touching the pavement, you’re too close.
- Keep your cell phone in your pocket. If your vehicle is stolen, you will have a way of contacting 911. If your cell phone is left inside the vehicle, you’re stranded without a way to call for help.
- Keep your head on a swivel, and your eyes moving; be aware of your surroundings. Often, if a criminal senses that a victim has observed him (“made him”), they’ll look for an easier victim.
- Be aware that some thieves will “bump” a vehicle from behind, and steal a victim’s vehicle when the victim stops to exchange information. Signal to the other vehicle’s driver to follow you to a well lit public area to exchange information. If you see a fire or police station, stop there and summon aid from inside.
- If you are a victim of Carjacking, cooperate with the suspect. Give him what he wants, and don’t argue. Make a mental note of the suspect(s) description, their vehicle’s description (if they have one), and report to 911 as soon as possible. **Your safety, and your life, are far more important than a car.**

Remember that YOU are an important partner in the fight against crime.