

For most people in Central Minnesota, a vehicle is essential to everyday living. We need our vehicles to commute to work, get to stores, and enjoy leisure activities. Whether they are new or old, luxurious or plain, most people in greater Minnesota need a vehicle to live their lives. Being the victim of a motor vehicle theft is a seriously traumatic event. Let's talk about how you can make sure your vehicle is with you long enough for our generously applied road salt to rust it into a pile of iron flakes.

The core principle in any crime prevention strategy is to create circumstances that make the commission of a crime as difficult as possible. There are a few easy steps any driver can take to make motor vehicle theft more difficult. We'll start with the easiest step, take your key with you. Nationally, studies indicate between 11% and 40% of all vehicles stolen have the keys inside them when they are taken. Over the last 18 months, all the motor vehicles reported to our office that were stolen by a stranger had the keys left in them. I know it is convenient to have the ignition key in the vehicle when you want to use it. I also know that your neighborhood may feel very safe and insulated from crime. However, nowhere is 100% free of crime and taking the keys out of the vehicle is an easy crime prevention step. Keep this in mind too as the weather gets colder. Leaving an idling vehicle unattended is an invitation to theft. To help ensure you have a warm commute, consider getting a remote start system to start the vehicle without leaving a key readily available for a thief.

The next easy step is locking your vehicle every time. Theft is often a crime of opportunity. A locked vehicle makes theft that much harder and that much more likely to attract attention. Locking your car every time builds a good habit that will help deter criminals, especially in those instances where you must park in an area where crime is more likely.

Most modern vehicles come standard with a factory installed theft deterrent alarm. Using this crime prevention tool is a great step. If you don't know how to use your vehicle's alarm system, consult your owner's manual. After market devices are also readily available and easy to install that work to keep your vehicle where it belongs. These after market devices have features that allow you to track your vehicle, receive alerts if the vehicle starts or moves, and even immobilize your vehicle from your smartphone. A low-tech solution could be as easy as installing a hidden switch that prevents power from reaching the ignition system. For any modern vehicle, I'd strongly recommend speaking to a professional mechanic or technician before making any modifications to your vehicle's ignition system. Safely interrupting the power of a modern vehicle is much different than installing a rocker switch on the coil wire of a 1979 AMC Gremlin.

One final note, make sure all the vehicles you own are titled in your name. If your vehicle is stolen, law enforcement is going to need the registered owner of the vehicle to sign a form attesting to the fact that the vehicle is stolen. This can become complex in the situation where someone has bought a vehicle from a private party and just hasn't quite gotten around to transferring the title yet. The ability to enter a vehicle's information into the national database of stolen vehicles is key to recovering the vehicle. To do so, the registered owner must sign the theft report. Make sure your vehicles are really yours according to the state.

Thieves can strike anywhere. When a thief takes a liking to your vehicle, make sure they're in for a rough ride when trying to steal it. For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.