



## Austin Police Department

# Auto Theft Unit

## Offense: AUTO THEFT

APD Cs # \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

### VEHICLE'S LICENSE PLATE

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ # \_\_\_\_\_

Assigned Detective: \_\_\_\_\_

512) \_\_\_\_\_

### VEHICLE STATUS SELF-CHECK TOOL:

[www.AUTORETURN.COM](http://www.AUTORETURN.COM)

Select: "Find Vehicle" (Top Right Header)

### INITIAL RESPONSE and AUTO THEFT INVESTIGATIONS

#### VERIFICATION OF ENTRY INTO DATABASES:

YOUR VEHICLE WAS ENTERED AS STOLEN IN LAW ENFORCEMENT DATABASES, LOCALLY, STATEWIDE, AND NATIONWIDE.

ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIAL WHO OBSERVES THE LICENSE PLATE OR VIN OF THIS VEHICLE, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LEAD TO ROUTINE IDENTIFICATION CHECKS OR SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY THAT WARRANTS SUCH A CHECK, WILL BE IMMEDIATELY NOTIFIED OF THE FACT THIS VEHICLE HAS BEEN REPORT STOLEN. THIS IS OFTEN THE FASTEST, MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS FOR RECOVERY.

#### INVESTIGATIVE LEADS AND EXISTENCE OF CERTAIN EVIDENCE:

IF, UPON INITIAL REVIEW, THERE ARE NO VIABLE LEADS BY WHICH AN INVESTIGATION MAY BEGIN, THIS CASE WILL BE SUSPENDED UNTIL SUCH TIME AS VIABLE LEADS DEVELOP, WHICH MAY OCCUR UPON RECOVERY.

#### FINGERPRINTS:

LEADS MAY OR MAY NOT DEVELOP WHEN ANY LIFTED PRINTS, IF OBTAINED, ARE PROCESSED. PRINTS FOUND ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE VEHICLE DO NOT ESTABLISH A DEFINITE SUSPECT. ANYONE CAN WALK BY AND TOUCH YOUR VEHICLE, YET COMMIT NO CRIME. THE CURRENT BACKLOG FOR LATENT PRINT PROCESSING IS ABOUT 24 MONTHS.

#### DNA EVIDENCE AS IT RELATES TO AUTO THEFTS:

DNA COMPARISONS ARE NOT CURRENTLY CONDUCTED FOR AUTO THEFT CASES, UNLESS IT IS AFFIRMATIVELY ESTABLISHED THAT THE AUTO THEFT WAS A "GATEWAY" CRIME TO COMMIT A VIOLENT CRIME AGAINST ANOTHER, OR AS A MEANS OF ESCAPE AFTERWARD.

#### G.P.S. GEOLOCATION CAPABILITY:

IF YOUR VEHICLE IS GPS EQUIPPED, OR THERE IS ANY ACTIVE SERVICE TO WHICH YOU SUBSCRIBE THAT CAN POSSIBLY LOCATE YOUR CAR, SUCH AS LOJACK, ONSTAR, SIRIUS XM, OR ANY DEVICE INSTALLED BY THE LENDER OR YOUR INSURANCE COMPANY, THE VICTIM SHOULD CONTACT THAT SERVICE PROVIDER TO ATTEMPT TO LOCATE AND CALL AUTO THEFT UNIT TO SPEAK WITH THE ASSIGNED INVESTIGATOR IF THIS IS A VIABLE OPPORTUNITY TO LOCATE.

#### VIDEO SURVEILLANCE VALUE:

VIDEO FOOTAGE MAY CONFIRM THE AUTO THEFT DID OCCUR, BUT VIDEO CAMERAS ARE VERY RARELY OF THE CLARITY AND DISTINCTION NECESSARY TO CAPTURE THE SPECIFIC IDENTITY OF A SUSPECT, OR THE LICENSE PLATE ON ANY ASSOCIATED VEHICLE. WITHOUT THERE ALSO BEING A WITNESS WITH SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE OF A SUSPECT AND SUSPECT VEHICLE TO CORROBORATE WHAT MAY BE SEEN, A VISUAL CAPTURE OF ANY QUALITY MAY END UP BEING OF NO INVESTIGATIVE VALUE.

IF YOU BELIEVE THERE IS USEFUL, CLOSE RANGE VIDEO AT A BUSINESS OR NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE, CONTACT THEM TO PRESERVE IT IMMEDIATELY, AND NOTIFY THE ASSIGNED INVESTIGATOR.

#### ARREST, CHARGES, AND PROSECUTION:

THE PERSON FOUND TO BE IN POSSESSION OF THE VEHICLE WILL, MOST LIKELY BE ARRESTED FOR THE AUTO THEFT. IF THE VEHICLE IS FOUND UNOCCUPIED, AGAIN, A VISUAL CAPTURE OF ANY QUALITY TAKEN FROM VIDEO SURVEILLANCE RECORDINGS ARE OF NO INVESTIGATIVE VALUE. WITHOUT THERE ALSO BEING A CORROBORATING WITNESS WHO CAN POSITIVELY IDENTIFY A PARTICULAR SUSPECT OUT OF A LINE UP.

#### CRIME PREVENTION:

WITH AUTO THEFTS, LIKE MANY OTHER TYPES OF THEFT, IT IS MOST OFTEN VERY DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY A SUSPECT, UNLESS THAT SUSPECT IS CAPTURED WHILE OPERATING YOUR VEHICLE. IT IS AN UNFORTUNATE FACT THAT THE BEST WAY TO AVOID BEING A VICTIM OF THIS CRIME, YOU MUST BE COMMITTED TO THE PREVENTION ASPECT. SEE THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS PAMPHLET FOR SUGGESTIONS.

### HOW CAN I CHECK THE STATUS OF MY VEHICLE?

Auto thefts, that were actually just mis-parked vehicles are not uncommon, especially if your parked around the downtown entertainment district, at another large event, at a mall, or on private property, such as an apartment complex, where towing unauthorized vehicles is enforced. If this may be the case, you can check AutoReturn.com as often as you want to determine if your car was privately towed. Tow companies have two hours from the time of impound to enter vehicles into this system. See web address below.

Regardless of the circumstances, Austin Police have made this public portal available for anyone who wants the ability to check on whether their vehicle has been towed from private property, or was recovered otherwise by Austin Police. NOTE: if your vehicle is recovered by another police agency, it is not necessarily entered on this website:

<https://www.AutoReturn.com>.

Choose "Find Vehicle" and "Austin, TX". Check by License Plate or the 17 digit VIN#.

### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR VEHICLE IS LOCATED?

Your vehicle will most likely be impounded by the Law Enforcement Agency that recovers it. It may not be in Austin. You may be notified by that police agency or their towing company, but you will also be notified by a member of the APD Auto Theft Unit within 48 hours. You will be given the name, location and phone # of the tow company that has your vehicle.

### FEES, EXPENSES, and PROOF OF OWNERSHIP REQUIRED:

Call the tow company before going to pick up your vehicle to find out what documents you are required to bring in order to release the vehicle to you, and the amount of fees due.

**Impound and Storage Fees:** You are responsible for paying all charges and fees associated with the towing of your vehicle and daily storage of you until you can pick it up. Contact your insurance company to determine whether or not these fees are reimbursed under your individual policy.

**If your vehicle was damaged: The cost of repairs is also your responsibility.** Contact your insurance company to determine whether repairs are reimbursed under your individual policy. You or your insurance company may seek civil restitution for repairs if a suspect was arrested; however, this is a civil matter that must be handled through insurance, a civil attorney, a Justice of the Peace (JP) or a judge.

**Police are not permitted by law to be involved in civil matters,** and cannot demand or force one individual to pay another for damages. Financial restitution may only occur upon mutual agreement, or by civil judgment issued by a JP in small claims court, or a judge in a criminal court of law at sentencing. Contact your insurance company or an attorney for guidance.

The Auto Theft Unit is not able to accept walk-in's who do not have an appointment with an assigned detective.



## Austin Police Auto Theft Unit

# AUTO THEFT/THEFT/BURGLARY PREVENTION TIPS

**In over 60% of Austin Auto Thefts** keys were left inside the vehicle. These vehicles probably would not have been stolen otherwise.

**DON'T leave car keys (to any vehicle), key fobs, locked inside a vehicle parked outside, even at your house.** This includes leaving the "valet" key inside – this key starts your car! Car burglars who break into one of your vehicles looking for valuables often decide to steal your 2nd car when they find that car key inside the 1<sup>st</sup> car.

**If you have a TOUCH PAD entry car door, or a KEYLESS FOB: DON'T lock your key inside the car believing it is secure.** Car thieves specifically target "touch pad entry" and keyless fob make/model vehicles because they know it is far more likely the owner locks the key/fob inside. Your car may be stolen if you and your key fob are within range of your push-to-start vehicle, if that feature is enabled.

**Many thieves watch you from a distance first to see if you exit your car empty-handed to go shopping or to exercise.** A thief may then decide to burglarize your home, because you are currently away from home, or may be at a later date. Thieves may find your address on papers, documents, mail, insurance cards, or on IDs in wallets left in your car. They may also find bank information, personal identification numbers, or passwords, and commit fraud. Don't store personally identifying information in your car.

**DON'T leave a garage door opener or house-keys inside any car left outside the garage or in a garage with the door up.** Car Burglars may then gain access to your home. Also consider storing your car keys at home in less obvious locations when not in use. Burglars who want to steal cars often enter homes while homeowners are away, knowing car keys are usually on a hook or table by the door.

**DON'T leave a purse, wallet, house keys, laptop, jewelry, cell phone, personal identification, any document showing home address, or weapon! unattended.** But if you must, keep them where others cannot see them and certainly DO NOT then leave car keys locked inside the vehicle, too. Car burglars look for a quick target and are far more likely to choose your car if you use a keypad or keyless remote AND valuables left in plain sight inside.

**DON'T leave your car running and unattended** while you go into a store, back inside your house to get what you forgot, or to let the car "warm up." The time you think you're saving by leaving a car running and unattended is an opportunity for another to steal your car.

**Buying vehicles from individuals directly, through Craigslist, or from other independent on-line sources:** Sales of stolen vehicles to unsuspecting buyers is a significant trend. Proving who the actual suspects are is virtually impossible in 99% of the cases. Often, unsuspecting buyers have no idea they've purchased a stolen vehicle until they go to the TX DMV to register it. Here are a few tips and tools that MAY help you avoid becoming a victim of this scam:

1. The golden rule for buying anything from an individual applies here, too: If the price is too good to be true – Beware!
2. Before any meeting in person, ask for the 17 digit Vehicle ID Number ("VIN") and the License Plate # and state of issue. If they are unable or unwilling to provide that basic information to you, Beware!
3. You can check the VIN# on a public databases to see if it matches the make and model of the car advertised and possibly to determine if it is stolen.
  - a. <http://www.decodethis.com> is a website that decodes the VIN# and can tell you the make/model/year vehicle.
  - b. [https://www.nicb.org/theft\\_and\\_fraud\\_awareness/vincheck](https://www.nicb.org/theft_and_fraud_awareness/vincheck) is hosted by the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) to provide citizens with some means to check if a vehicle has been reported stolen. The check can be performed by 17 digit VIN#.
    - 1) This website only reports stolen cars that STILL HAVE CURRENT INSURANCE. Some victims cancel insurance on their stolen vehicles immediately so keep in mind the car may still be stolen, but won't be shown here. While not 100% guaranteed, it is worth checking on this site.
    - 2) It takes about 3 business days for an insured stolen vehicle to be reported as such on this website. If you're buying a vehicle, resist being rushed to buy now.
4. Before you meet the person to view the vehicle, request that they send a photo of themselves to you by email or text so you can recognize them at the meeting location. Again, if they are unwilling or unable to do so – Beware!
5. Before you meet the person, request that they bring with them to the meeting, 1) the vehicle title 2) a state-issued photo ID and 3) a second form of identification for verification, such as mail with their name and current address. Again, if this person is unwilling or unable to do so – Beware!
6. Always meet in a public place during the daytime, or that is well lit and open for business at the time. If possible, bring at least one other person with you. If you buy the vehicle, get all sets of keys.
7. Strongly consider changing (re-keying) the door and ignition locks to your newly purchased vehicle quickly.

### **Think twice before loaning your car to another. Did you know?**

1. If your car becomes involved in a wreck while loaned to another, you're liable for cost of repairs and injuries. Costs may not be covered by your car insurance because the driver wasn't insured. APD investigates False Report to Peace Officer offenses.
2. The cost to impound your vehicle after a collision, and to repair it, is ultimately still your responsibility, regardless of the criminal or civil aspects of your case. Reimbursement for such costs is a civil matter, and your responsibility to pursue and collect.
3. You may also be financially liable for harm caused to third parties otherwise affected by the actions of any person who had permission to drive your vehicle, or who gained access to your vehicle after you left the car key inside and it was found. The civil attorneys must prove negligence.

For resources on crime prevention, or to host a crime prevention or VIN etching event, contact the Auto Theft Neighborhood Liaison at 512-974-6290.