

Auto

SIX TIPS TO FOIL AUTO THEFT

Auto theft is on the rise in Washington, with the Tacoma and the Seattle-metro areas ranking among the worst 10 spots nationwide. Spokane, Yakima, and the Portland-Vancouver areas check in around 50th.

Police report that, in more than 50 percent of cases, car owners allowed easy heists by leaving their doors unlocked. Nearly 15 percent of those drivers left the keys, too.

Follow these tips to avoid giving crooks the green light:

1. Pocket your keys and lock the doors whenever you park – even if you'll be away just a few seconds. Never hide a spare key under the seat or above the visor. Those are the first places thieves look.
2. At attended parking lots, leave only the ignition key with the car. Take the trunk key, the key to your home, and all other keys with you.
3. When parking on the street, find a well-lit area. Good lighting is even more critical if you're parking overnight. (Thieves intent on ransacking cars for stereos and other equipment often strike between 3 and 5 a.m.).
4. Don't invite a break-in by leaving valuables like cameras, CDs, or packages in view. Take them with you or lock them in the trunk. Choose flush-mounted rather than cabinet stereo speakers (which attract thieves).
5. When stashing valuables in the trunk, do it before you park so a thief doesn't see you. If you don't have a trunk, put belongings out of sight on the floor or under the seat.
6. Be extra careful at service stations and convenience stores. Thieves lurk in parking lots and listen for the bell that dings when a key is in the ignition.

