THE $1,000,000,000 PROBLEM

That's a lot of money – and it's about the cost of vehicles stolen from people just like you each year in Los Angeles County. Approximately 130,000 vehicles are stolen annually in L.A. by theft and fraud, so it's no wonder that we are often referred to as "The Car Theft Capital of the World."

While the dollar loss is staggering, vehicle theft and vehicle fraud are about more than just money and statistics. They're about people. People like:

- The couple who sacrificed and saved to buy a reliable used car for work and school, only to have their hopes for a better future dashed when a thief broke into their car and stole it.
- The unsuspecting buyer who purchased a late model car at a bargain price thousands of dollars below the actual value only to lose the car when ownership could not be transferred because the seller provided counterfeit and forged documents.
- The self-employed contractor who relied on his truck and the equipment in it for his livelihood, but who was temporarily put out of business when a thief made off with the truck and equipment.
- The senior citizen who relied on her car as a link to the outside world and vital services, but who was stranded when the car was stolen.

Vehicle theft and vehicle fraud are considered property crimes. They represent almost half of the dollar value of all property crimes combined. But speak to any victim, and you'll learn that these crimes are not just about property. They are about the helpless feeling of being violated, the trauma that victims feel, and the unfairness that something you have worked hard to attain and use in your daily life is taken by a criminal who has no concern for you or the ramifications of their vile act.

TRAP is pleased to present some hints that can help lessen the likelihood that you will be the victim of vehicle theft and vehicle fraud. While these hints may not stop crimes in all cases, and there are certainly other steps you can take, they serve as a starting point to help you "harden the target."

TRAP

Taskforce for Regional Autotheft Prevention (TRAP) is Los Angeles County's regional, multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency task force that investigates, prosecutes and deters vehicle theft and vehicle fraud on a coordinated and cooperative basis. It is authorized by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and administered through the Countywide Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee with cooperation from the L.A. County Chiefs of Police Association.

TRAP is comprised of six regional teams of investigators from law enforcement agencies such as the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, LAPD, CHP and local police departments throughout L.A. County. The District Attorney's Office provides full-time prosecutors for TRAP, and there are liaison personnel from the Probation Dept., California Parole Office, Dept.. of Motor Vehicles, U.S. Customs, F.B.I., and the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB). Trap also has sworn and civilian headquarters' personnel who perform vital support services, including operation of the TRAP Auto Theft Investigative Network (ATIN). ATIN is a state-of-the-art communications and computer system that provides a one-stop investigative data center offering work-ups, case histories, M.O. data, suspect personal history information and other valuable resources.

TRAP is highly successful in combating vehicle theft and vehicle fraud by focusing on organized rings and illegal business operations. Activities include the investigation, apprehension and prosecution of "chop shop" operators who strip parts off stolen vehicles or alter them so identification is impeded or impossible; international rings that steal vehicles and send them to other countries; "scam" artists who obtain vehicles by fraud; and other criminals who engage in just about every imaginable form of auto theft. TRAP also engages in an active public education program to prevent and deter vehicle theft and vehicle fraud.

If you are a member of an organization that would like to hear a guest speaker on the topic of vehicle theft and vehicle fraud prevention, contact TRAP at (818) 572-5610.

This brochure was written and produced by TRAP, and made possible by a public-private sector partnership with

Greater Los Angeles Motor Car Dealers Association

Vehicle Theft & Vehicle Fraud In Los Angeles County:

THE $1 BILLION PROBLEM YOU CAN HELP SOLVE

TASKFORCE for REGIONAL AUTOTHEFT PREVENTION

BUYING A VEHICLE

- Use common sense.
  If it looks too good to be true, it probably is!
- Don't meet the seller in an unsafe location. Try to meet at a permanent location of the seller, and avoid situations where you only reach the seller on a beeper.
- Don't go alone, and be sure someone who isn't going with you knows where you are going and who you are meeting.
- Let the seller know that you will not be bringing cash, but will pay by personal or cashier's check if you decide to buy the vehicle.
- Ask the seller for valid picture I.D., and compare the information to the vehicle registration.
- Be leery of pre-signed ownership documents, or sellers who are not both the registered and legal owner. The documents may be forged, or a lender may have a lien that prevents transfer of title.
- If the ownership documents are recently issued or duplicate, the vehicle may have changed hands recently or the title lost. Inquire why.
- Check the ownership documents for an indication that the vehicle is a salvage, and be very cautious if it is. Many salvage vehicles are rebuilt with stolen parts or are unsafe. Also be alert to these issues if any vehicle appears to have been extensively damaged or rebuilt.
- Be sure all numbers match. Look at the numbers on both the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) plate and the license plate. They should be the same as on the registration and title.
- Do not buy a vehicle with a VIN Plate that appears to have been tampered with.
- Note differences in interior features. Are all items the correct color?
- Before you pay, be sure the documentation is adequate to obtain registered ownership and, if appropriate, legal title. Check with the Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV) first if there is any doubt.

OWNING A VEHICLE

- Park in well-lighted, visible and well-traveled areas. Be aware of your surroundings.
- Lock your car and don't leave the key in it.
- Use one or more anti-theft security devices such as a steering wheel lock, shut-off switch, alarm, window etching or electronic tracking system.
- Don't leave valuables or packages in plain sight, even if the vehicle is locked.
- If you do travel with valuables or packages, put them out of sight when you first enter your car. Otherwise, a thief who observes you putting them away after you park might break in or steal the car once you leave.
- Keep the doors locked and windows up at least most of the way when driving to discourage carjacking.
- Never leave the key code in the car or on the key ring.
- Be aware that certain models are more frequent targets of theft. Many insurance agents can provide current information.
- Keep registration documents with you when operating the vehicle, but DO NOT keep title or other ownership documents in the car.
- Be aware of personal points of identification to distinguish your vehicle if it's stolen. Examples include scratches, stains, decals, etc. Also, permanently etch or mark accessories with your driver's license number, and drop a business card down the window slot to serve as identification in the event the VIN is removed.

VEHICLE INFORMATION CARD

Complete the information requested in this card. Then clip out the card and carry it with you. Also keep a copy in a safe place. Do not keep it with your keys. If your vehicle is stolen, contact the local law enforcement authorities immediately. The information will be helpful to them in their effort to locate your vehicle as quickly as possible.

Year_____ Make_____ Model_____

Color_____ License #_____

VIN_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Insurance Co._____

Policy #_____

SELLING A VEHICLE

- Use common sense.
  If you don't feel comfortable, don't go forward.
- Do not invite a buyer you don't know to your home. He or she could be a burglar or car thief casing your car or house.
- Don't give out unnecessary personal information about yourself, your family or your schedule.
- Don't consider a test drive until you're confident the buyer is legitimate. Be sure the buyer has a valid driver's license with a photo, and leave the information about the buyer with someone who is not going on the test drive with you.
- Don't let the buyer test drive your vehicle alone, even if the buyer offers to leave the keys to his or her car with you as security. It may be stolen, or of little value compared to yours. If possible, also have a friend or relative of yours go along with you for added safety. It is best to meet the buyer in daylight hours, and at a well-traveled location.
- Limit the test drive to areas that are familiar to you.
- Do not surrender the ownership documents until you have verified that the funds are valid. Cash or cashier's checks can be counterfeit of forged, and stop payments can be placed on checks. Confirm that payment is valid, regardless of the form of payment. Consider going to the bank the personal or cashier's check is drawn on to consummate the transaction. Also, if you accept any significant sum of cash, do so in a location where you can immediately deposit it, rather than carry it and become a robbery target.
- Complete a bill of sale with an odometer reading and all pertinent information about the vehicle and the buyer, as well as the date and time of sale. Have it signed by both parties, and keep a copy. If there is a lien, verify that it is paid or that the lender is releasing you from any obligation.
- Immediately notify the Dept. of Motor Vehicles of the sale, even if the buyer intends to transfer title right away. You remain financially liable for accidents and certain other matters until proper paperwork is filed with the DMV.