For Immediate Release
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St. Petersburg Police Department’s new DROP Unit deals with the rise in auto theft

St. Petersburg Police Department’s new DROP Unit deals with the rise in auto thefts as data shows a key is used in 83% of auto thefts in the city this year.

An analysis of auto thefts in 2013 reveals a key was used in 83% (460 out of 551 auto thefts) of the stolen vehicle cases involving cars, trucks and SUV’s.

In most cases, drivers left the keys in the ignition or somewhere easily accessible inside the vehicle and it is this fact that we attribute to the increase in auto thefts this year.

Despite the increase this year, the number of auto thefts remains down 19% compared to the previous five-year-average.

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Earlier this year, Chief of Police Charles “Chuck” Harmon formed a new unit called the Deterrence, Response, Outreach & Prevention (DROP) to heighten public awareness about crime prevention tips for the easy-to-deter property crimes like auto theft.

The DROP Unit works closely with other units in the Department to quickly identify crime patterns or trends when they occur and develop strategies to prevent these crimes from spreading or expanding in a particular area.

Our analysis of auto theft data indicates many suspects lay in wait outside of convenience stores or strip malls for potential victims to leave their car engines running while they go inside for a quick purchase. Once the victim has gone into the store, the suspects move in and drive off in the vehicle.

These types of crimes can easily be prevented and for that reason the DROP Unit created a catchy crime prevention video featuring a hapless victim named “Willie Everlern.” The vignette uses DROP police officers as actors and humor to educate and warn drivers to take their keys with them when they shop.

The DROP unit's video may be viewed at http://youtu.be/zL4bwNMTISk.

Sergeant Brian Taylor supervises the eight detectives in the DROP Unit. They work in uniform and drive marked cruisers to enhance their visibility to the community.
Sergeant Taylor will be available to talk to the media about auto theft problem and their efforts to educate the public at 2:00 p.m. today at the Lakeview Shopping Center, 3400 22nd Avenue South. The gas station at that location has been identified as one of several auto theft "hotspots" around the City.

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