St. Petersburg Police Department’s DROP Unit’s First Initiative is to Prevent Auto Thefts

The Department’s newly formed Deterrence, Response, Outreach & Prevention (DROP) Unit will launch their first crime prevention initiative at 2:30 pm tomorrow, Thursday, May 23rd at the BP Service Station, 2753 5th Avenue South.

The DROP Unit was recently formed to work 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.

Sergeant Brian Taylor supervises the eight uniformed detectives in the DROP Unit. They will work in uniform and drive marked cruisers to enhance their visibility to the community. They will work a flexible schedule which allows them to respond quickly, which hopefully limits the effect of these crimes on our community.

The DROP Unit also plans to develop informative, catchy, crime prevention videos (short vignettes that mix crime data with a little bit of humor) and use the Department’s social media sites to distribute these videos to the community.

Each video will feature a central character - Willie Everlern - a hapless victim who seems to always find a way to become the victim of a crime - to effectively communicate a crime prevention message to the public.

The DROP officers have already crafted their first short video to address a notable trend behind the increase in auto thefts this year.

Over the first four months of this year auto thefts in St. Petersburg have increased 43% from the same time period last year.

In a majority of those cases, the victim’s left their car keys in the ignition.

Many auto theft suspects lay in wait outside of convenience stores or strip malls where potential victims tend to leave their car engines running while the 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 are easy to prevent and for that reason the DROP Unit members will be fanning out across the City to post signs warning drivers to take their keys with them when the shop. They will focus on those locations that have seen the greatest frequency of these types of cases to educate the public to the problem and reducing overall auto thefts.

Since many of these stolen cars are also used in other crimes, such as robbery and burglary, and it is hoped that those categories of crimes will be affected by this program as well.
The media is invited to attend the launch of this initiative and to speak with DROP Unit supervisors and officers about their new role in the Department’s effort to prevent crime.

The BP Station was identified as one of those locations suffering a high frequency of these types of auto thefts and ownership is working with the officers to help spread the word to his patrons. Afterwards the media are welcome to accompany DROP officers to other locations where the signs will be posted as well.

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