St. Petersburg Experiences Increase in Auto Burglaries

Detectives are reaching out to the public, asking for their assistance in abating a growing problem with the crime of auto burglary. Since 2012, auto burglaries in the City have increased by 45% and detectives report that a vast majority of these incidents could have easily been prevented.

Sergeant Brian Taylor of our Department’s DROP Unit will be available today to talk to the media about the problem and one victim has agreed to talk about her particular experience.

In the month of January 2014 alone, detectives state that 76% of reported auto burglaries were to unlocked vehicles. An additional 11% involve property taken from open truck beds and trailers. Only 13% involve forced entry and in many of those cases victims had left purses, wallets, cell phones or other valuables in plain view, prompting suspects to break out windows or punch out doorlocks to gain entry.

Of particular concern is that in some cases victims are leaving firearms in their cars overnight allowing suspects to steal the weapons by simply breaking out the window glass, punching out the door locks or, in some instances, opening an unlocked car door. These firearms once in the hands of criminal suspects, many of them teenagers, can result in an escalation to violent crimes such as robbery or assault. In one recent case a homeowner, who confronted a group of suspects burglarizing his car, was shot at as he began to chase them through the neighborhood.

Detectives also note the continuing problem of victims leaving their keys in their unattended and unlock cars, usually resulting in a stolen vehicle which can then be utilized by suspects to become more mobile and thus commit more crime.

The majority of auto burglaries occur during late night hours as suspects walk through neighborhoods and apartment communities looking into cars and pulling on door handles. We have posted two videos from home surveillance cameras on our YouTube page showing actual cases which typify this type of crime.

You will note that in the first video (link to http://youtu.be/ZlRFPwI_9U ) as the suspect pulls on the door of a locked car, he is holding purses in his other hand that he has taken from other cars in the neighborhood. This incident occurred at about 2:30 a.m., January 31st 2014, in a neighborhood located in the 6900 block of 11 Avenue North. That suspect has not been apprehended.

The second video (link to http://youtu.be/cve3nRt_XbA ) occurred during the early morning hours of November 30th, 2013 when two suspects committed a string of auto burglaries and vandalisms in the Yacht Club Estates neighborhood, around the 8000 block of 13th Avenue South. Those two suspects have been charged.
In an effort to reduce auto burglaries and the additional crimes that can result from them, St. Petersburg Police Department is asking vehicle owners to take a few relatively easy steps.

1. Lock your car and take your keys, even if leaving your car unattended for only a few minutes.

2. Do not leave valuables in plain sight inside the car. Take purses, wallets and other valuables with you or secure them in the trunk (unless access to the trunk can be gained via the passenger compartment).

3. Do not leave firearms unattended and unsecured in your car. Responsible gun owners must recognize that even in a locked car, auto safety glass is easily broken and does not provide sufficient security to keep a firearm out of the hands of thieves. Once in their hands, YOUR gun can be used to commit a host of violent crimes that can result in serious injury or death.

4. Remove, if practical, or at least secure tools and other items of value left unattended in open truck beds or trailers.

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