

Preventing Auto Theft

Automobile Theft is defined as the theft or attempted theft of automobiles, trucks, buses, motorcycles, motor scooters, and snowmobiles. In 2000, for the first time since 1990, the number of motor vehicle thefts across the United States increased from the previous year's numbers.

Automobile theft occurs once every 27.1 seconds in the United States. One of every five vehicles stolen has the keys in it. A higher percentage of automobiles are stolen over the weekend. The longer the automobile is in the hands of the thief, the lower the chance of recovery.

Only two states - California and Florida - have higher numbers of automobile thefts than Texas. This is due in part to its proximity to the Mexican border where once cars are transported over the border, they become harder to locate and transport back into the country.

To address this problem, the Texas Automobile Theft Prevention Authority (ATPA) was created in 1991 as a statewide effort to reduce vehicle theft. Established under Texas legislation through a \$1 assessment fee per insured vehicle per year, it funds programs designed to reduce auto theft in cities and counties throughout Texas. It supports a statewide law enforcement network through grants, theft reduction initiatives, education, and public awareness.

The message reaches individual drivers, especially young drivers, through the "Watch Your Car" curriculum is designed to last 55 to 57 minutes so that it can be taught in a classroom environment. ATPA provides printed materials, scenarios for discussion, and a videotape. Bumper stickers, brochures, and public service advertisements also help spread the message about preventing auto theft.

In addition, ATPA funds various initiatives that help law enforcement recover stolen vehicles. Help End Auto Theft (HEAT) is a statewide vehicle registration program that helps law enforcement identify stolen vehicles. Rather than using decals that can be removed by car thieves, HEAT participants sign agreements that allow peace officers to stop vehicles being driven between the hours of 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. The Protect Our Parts program uses visibly traceable labels printed with ID numbers that attach permanently to vehicle parts and accessories. the information is entered into a database available to law enforcement officers worldwide.

Since its inception in 1991, The Texas Automobile Theft Prevention Authority has reduced the state's vehicle theft rate by 54 percent, preventing \$471 million in losses.

For more information, please contact: Texas Automobile Theft Prevention Authority, 4000 Jackson Avenue, Austin, TX 78779. Phone: 512-374-5101 or website: Texas Auto Theft Prevention Authority.