

## Thefts from autos are on the rise

Went up 33 per cent in 28 days in downtown core

**Lena Sin**

The Province

*Sunday, September 14, 2008*

Seems like we never learn.

One minute we're complaining about how we hate having our cars broken into, the next we're leaving our cameras, laptops and spare change lying around in plain view.

"It's daunting. The supply of things visible and easy to steal amazes me, because the supply is endless, and yet you look at the number of people getting ripped off. When will they learn?"

Muses Vancouver police Sgt. Mark Tonner.

CREDIT: istockphoto.com

The latest statistics from the VPD show theft from auto was up 14 per cent in the 28-day period from Aug. 10 to Sept. 6 compared with the previous 28-day period (July 13 to Aug. 9).

The latest statistics from the VPD show theft from auto was up 14 per cent in the 28-day period from Aug. 10 to Sept. 6 compared with the previous 28-day period (July 13 to Aug. 9).

That is, some 896 cars were broken into during the most recent reporting period compared with 787 in the previous reporting period.

Some areas in Vancouver fared worse than others. Most notably, the downtown core, which includes everything west of Cambie Street, saw theft from auto increase 33 per cent in the period. Tonner believes this could be due to some chronic crooks being out of jail.

The Downtown Eastside was also up by 10 per cent, while southeast Vancouver and

Kitsilano were down one and seven per cent, respectively.

Special attention paid to areas around SkyTrain stations was likely the reason behind the slight dip in southeast Vancouver, while Tonner believes Kits experienced improvement due to a VPD initiative to get street people into housing.

Interestingly, three upscale downtown hotel parking lots were among the most-targeted areas for thieves in this latest reporting period.

"[I] don't know why," says Tonner. "I'd have to speculate that upscale hotels have

upscale clients."

Two of the three hotels are now working with the VPD to improve security, while the third has not responded to "police overtures."

The good news is theft from auto is down 12 per cent year-to-date 2008 compared with year-to-date 2007, and overall, property crime is also down by eight per cent over the same period.

A spike in theft from autos in August is fairly typical, due to the arrival of unaware tourists and generally more people heading downtown.

"It is truly amazing what people leave in plain view on their car seats," says Tonner, adding that three years ago he met a tourist who was astonished to lose a \$10,000 bundle of US bills from the front seat of his car in Stanley Park.

"I showed support and sympathy, but it makes you wonder where people come from that it would be OK to do such a thing," he notes wryly.

And if you think you're better off leaving your car in a secure parking lot, sadly, you're wrong.

The majority of these crimes happen in parking lots rather than on the street. And just because there's a gate doesn't mean your valuables are any safer.

"If [a thief] follows someone into a secure parking lot, then the security works against you because the police are kept out," says Tonner.

Simple tips: Don't leave valuables visible, leave change trays open and if you're putting valuables in your trunk, make the switch a block away from where you park.

It's also worth looking for "Safer Parking Program" logos, which indicate lots with upgraded security such as guards, better lighting and video cameras.

n Visit [www.theprovince.com](http://www.theprovince.com) to see more crime maps.

© The Vancouver Province 2008