



News Release

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PA AUTO THEFT PREVENTION AUTHORITY ASKS CAR OWNERS TO STOP PUFFING AND PROTECT THEIR CARS FROM THEFT

Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania (February, 2014) – The Pennsylvania Auto Theft Prevention Authority (ATPA) and its partners are traveling the state to show drivers what can happen when cars are left “puffing” in cold weather.

“A ‘puffer’ is a car that’s left unlocked, running, and unattended to warm up,” said Steven Wheeler, executive director of ATPA. “Within seconds, a puffer can disappear. We want to prevent this easy theft and make it much harder for anyone to steal your car.”

“Many cold weather thefts are simple crimes of opportunity,” said Sgt. Dan Buckley, member of the Philadelphia Police Major Crimes Auto Squad. “Often, the thief didn’t set out to steal a car that day, but on a cold day, a warm unlocked car is hard to resist. The thief will use it to get across town, or much worse — to commit other crimes with your car or strip it and sell the parts.”

During the week of February 22, ATPA will hold media events in Pittsburgh, Johnstown, Harrisburg, Lancaster, York, Allentown, Scranton, and Philadelphia to make Pennsylvanians aware of “puffing” and remind them to protect their cars. ATPA is also sharing surveillance video of stolen cars and displaying a stripped car at the media events to show drivers how dramatically their car can transform from one of their important possessions to an almost bare metal frame.

More than 13,000 cars were stolen in Pennsylvania last year. ATPA’s grantees estimate nearly 50% of stolen cars were left unlocked, often with the keys inside. “The most effective anti-theft tool is to lock your car and take your keys,” said Wheeler. “It’s not a fancy message. It’s common sense, but not common practice.”

ATPA’s partner, AAA, urges motorists to inquire with their auto insurance agent about discounts for anti-theft and/or vehicle recovery devices. “Pennsylvania is one of nine states that requires insurers to

provide car owners with discounts on comprehensive insurance rates for anti-theft devices,” said Jana L. Tidwell, Manager of Public and Government Affairs for AAA Mid-Atlantic. “This discount is applied when the vehicle has an activated factory or after-market recovery device or tracking system such as GM's OnStar system, LoJack, or Teletrac. Such devices have been quite successful in not only recovering stolen vehicles, but also leading law enforcement to chop shops and thwarting the export of stolen cars.”

According to Pennsylvania state insurance guidelines, if the anti-theft device is factory installed the VIN number should trigger the discount. If the anti-theft device was installed after-market, proof on installation (usually in the form of an installation receipt) will be required to receive the discount.

In addition, AAA reiterates that puffing is unnecessary when it comes to your car's ability to perform on the road. “Today's automobiles have fuel injection systems rather than carburetors so they do not need a long warm up time to keep from having drivability concerns,” notes Tidwell. “Even in very cold temperatures, modern vehicles (those built since 1990) require no more than 10 to 30 seconds to get the oil moving through the engine. Puffing vehicles serve no purpose in terms of performance, but rather simply warm up the inside temperature for the driver and passengers.”

Following these simple, common sense tips, at home, work, or while on vacation, can spare you the hassle and expense of having your car stolen:

- **Lock the car, take the keys, every time.** For most drivers, it's a habit to either leave the keys in the car, or to take them with you. If it's not a habit for you, consciously make the decision to double check that you have your keys as you walk away from the vehicle. No place is safe from vehicle theft, even your driveway.
- **No puffing: Do not leave your car running and unattended.** While it's tempting to let the heater keep the car warm while you run into grab a cup of coffee, it only takes a thief a few seconds to steal your car. It is illegal to leave a car running and unattended on a public road in Pennsylvania.
- **Don't leave valuables in your car.** Leaving cell phones, mail, garage door openers, wallets, computers, or other valuables in the car attracts thieves. Leaving mail and sensitive information in your car also leaves you vulnerable to identity theft. Leaving keys and garage door openers can also invite burglary to your home.

Created in 1994 by the state General Assembly, the Pennsylvania Auto Theft Prevention Authority combats auto theft by providing grants statewide to law enforcement agencies, conducting public education initiatives, and providing specialized training. During the past decade, the rate of auto theft in Pennsylvania has declined 52% (and at a faster rate of decline than the national average). For more information about auto theft in Pennsylvania, county-by-county statistics, and theft prevention tips, visit www.watchyourcar.org.