



NEWS

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CHP: FEWER VEHICLES STOLEN IN 2006 **Ninety Percent of Stolen Cars Reunited with Owners**

Task forces and technology key to law enforcement's fight to stop car thieves

(Sacramento) Vehicle theft in California is on the decline. According to California Highway Patrol (CHP) statistics there was a 5.5 percent decrease statewide, or 14,399 fewer vehicles stolen, in 2006 from the previous year. Additionally, the majority of cars reported stolen were recovered. Ninety percent of the 247,896 cars stolen in 2006 were reunited with their owners.

“Car theft is a crime of opportunity,” said CHP Commissioner Mike Brown. “A little bit of prevention can go a long way, but when a car is stolen, the tools we have now are helping to return the stolen cars to their rightful owners.”

The CHP is involved in 16 county-funded vehicle theft task forces. These investigative teams comprised of a number of law enforcement agencies throughout the state, use bait cars to combat auto theft.

Bait cars are outfitted with a global-positioning system (GPS) and a video camera. The location, speed and direction of the vehicle are tracked via GPS. Officers are tipped off when a thief attempts to steal a car. As soon as officers are in position, the engine can be disabled with the click of a computer mouse and the suspect inside, arrested. The video footage is then used as evidence in court to prosecute the suspect.

The Bait Car program has proven to be a successful deterrent. Upwards of 95 percent of the time, if an activation occurs on a bait car, the thief will eventually steal the car and will also be arrested. In 2006, the department made 357 arrests from bait car deployments.

“Criminals are beginning to wonder what is, and what isn't, a bait car,” said Commissioner Brown.

Another tool being used by the department to recover stolen vehicles is Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR). ALPR has allowed the CHP to seize or recover 868 wanted or stolen

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vehicles worth more than \$7 million and, in the process, arrest 535 suspects through the period ending September 2006.

The system, mounted onto marked patrol cars, reads license plates of vehicles and compares them against the state's database of stolen and wanted vehicles. Currently, the CHP has a 73 percent recovery rate using ALPR.

“It’s like an electronic hot sheet; it allows officers to obtain information instantly on a car’s license plate to see if it belongs to a stolen car,” said Commissioner Brown.

Stanislaus County, an area particularly hard hit by vehicle theft in recent years, has noticed a difference since the implementation of the new auto-theft technology. The County saw a 40.6 percent decrease in the number of vehicles stolen from 2005 to 2006.

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