



National Motor Vehicle
Theft Reduction Council
driving down vehicle theft

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theft torque

StratPlan 2008 – Reform Beyond 2009

The NMVTRC's annual strategic planning workshops wrapped up last month after taking place in each capital city throughout April and May. The 2008 workshops were again well attended, indicating strong continuing interest in the NMVTRC's reform program.

The theme of this year's forums – *Reform Beyond 2009* – was designed to gauge stakeholders' perceived risks to sustaining recent theft reductions and generate discussion for a new generation of countermeasures revolving around the 'Four E's' model of education, engineering, enforcement and encouragement. The Four E's model has been used extensively by road safety policy makers, to ensure a holistic approach to the safety challenge. While there are some clear distinctions between road safety and car crime settings there are also many common themes, such as the risk taking behaviour of young males.

The clearly predominant theme to emerge from this year's discussions was the need to really focus on unrecovered vehicles in order to make further inroads into the activities of profit-motivated thieves. While the volume of unrecovered PLCs has remained stable over the last six years, there have been major changes in the characteristics of the vehicles that appear to simply 'vanish,' with middle aged (i.e. those aged 6-10 years) and older vehicles (more than 11 years old) making up a bigger proportion of the total compared to five years ago. As a group, missing vehicles now present a bigger proportion of total thefts with one in five stolen vehicles now unrecovered, compared to close to one in eight five years ago.

Major reforms to re-registration processes have virtually eliminated traditional car rebirthing, where identifiers from a written-off vehicle are simply used to re-identify a stolen equivalent. However, as a result, criminal networks have adapted to exploit other gaps in the process. Discussions with stakeholders identified five major factors driving the escalation in the proportion of unrecovered vehicles. These are:

- the use of repairable write-offs as a 'trojan horse' for stolen components, which can be almost impossible to detect or trace with certainty;
- the elevated precious metals market with recent reports of vehicles fetching more than \$300 per tonne;

- the involvement of unlicensed motor car traders in the end-of-life vehicle processing chain and the demand for 'black market' replacement components for older vehicles;
- the high number of stolen vehicles being dumped in waterways and bushland with police in Victoria and New South Wales recovering more than 200 immersed vehicles in just two locations in the past 12 months; and
- a breakdown in local government protocols for removing 'abandoned' vehicles, with a police operation in just three municipalities in Victoria finding up to 10 per cent of abandoned vehicles designated for auction or crushing were in fact uncleared stolen vehicles.

Whilst the unrecovered rate continues to be a challenge for stakeholders, thefts for short term use still represent the overwhelming majority of total thefts, particularly for smaller jurisdictions where theft numbers are prone to wild fluctuations. There was the view amongst stakeholders for the need to continue to develop clear and innovative community education messages, with more focus on the importance of securing car keys and transponders as this type of theft becomes more prominent as the immobilised fleet increases; as well as continuing to maintain and encourage effective youth diversionary interventions to prevent recidivist offending and move these young people away from the justice system.

Other issues emerged around engineering and enforcement remedial actions. These were the growing concern for theft from vehicles, including number plate theft in the face of rising petrol prices, and an increase in the theft of portable navigation units. Support for microdotting key fleets also remained strong. Furthermore, there is considerable support for examining New South Wales' express re-birthing laws as a potential model for national application to improve investigative outcomes. Imminent problems surrounding growing proportions of motorcycle to overall vehicle theft was also considered a prominent concern.

Each of these themes will feature prominently in the NMVTRC's new Strategic Plan due to be submitted to police ministers and the Insurance Council at the end of July.

Project 'Council Liaison'

Increases in the proportion of middle-aged and older vehicles that are stolen and not recovered has prompted an investigation into the reporting of vehicles deemed 'abandoned' by local governments. Through police liaison with local councils in Victoria it has become apparent that there is a breakdown in local government protocols for dealing with abandoned vehicles. When such vehicles are

discovered by councils they often end up being sold to wreckers or metal recyclers. Unfortunately this has led to some stolen/not recovered vehicles meeting the same end fate without being removed from the missing vehicle list.

In February of this year Victoria Police commenced a liaison project with three local councils in order

to gauge the extent of the problem. Over the four and a half month duration of the project up to 10 per cent of abandoned vehicles designated for auction or crushing were found to be in fact uncleared stolen vehicles.

A Victoria Police task force is also investigating a series of thefts of pre-1990 model vehicles in poor condition by an individual posing to be a council officer around metropolitan Melbourne. The elevated precious metals market means these older vehicles are in high demand for scrap metal. Both the demand for scrap metal and local council management of abandoned vehicles are factors making a substantial contribution to increasing numbers of older unrecovered vehicles.

Project 'Council Liaison' is an ongoing initiative and the NMVTRC will continue to work with police and local governments to establish appropriate protocols to ensure their recovery status is formally noted prior to any disposal action.



An 'abandoned' stolen vehicle. Picture courtesy of Victoria Police.

Gearing up to tackle motorcycle theft

The national motorcycle summit will be held in Sydney on 19 August. The summit will involve key stakeholders including motorcycle importers and retail traders, insurers, police, transport agencies, rider associations and industry related media. Key challenges for curbing the growth of motorcycle theft include the characteristics of motorcycles that allow easy portability, parts demand, and traceability, particularly in the off-road sector. Invitations will be forwarded to key stakeholders in early July.

Trialling first option salvage for recyclers

The NMVTRC is proposing to trial a scheme which would provide first salvage sales to accredited automotive recycling businesses in an attempt to ensure the best salvage is only available to the legitimate trade, and criminals and illegal traders are effectively excluded.

The trial would operate under the supervision of the National Parts Code (NPC), which was established by the NMVTRC in 2004 to limit the opportunity for criminals to launder stolen parts via the legitimate supply chain. The trial has two main objectives:

- to provide legitimate recycling businesses with a tangible incentive to participate in the Motor Trades Association of Australia accreditation program and to comply with its requirements about the traceability of stock; and

- to provide a fairer market for legitimate traders by denying criminal and illegal traders access to the best salvage vehicles.

Under the trial certified recyclers would have first option on salvage sales through an internet based auction. Any unsold stock would then be returned to the public auction process.

The final details of the model are still being finalised in conjunction with insurers and auction houses. However the trial is expected to run for six months, with the NPC committing to a minimum of 200 certified recyclers at start-up with a target of certifying at least 300 participating businesses over the trial period.

Importers lead locals on vehicle ID

It's been more than five years in the making but Hyundai and Nissan have become the first volume vehicle manufacturers to adopt a truly secure compliance label across their vehicle range.

The traditionally poor standard of vehicle identification has greatly contributed to the ease in which thieves are able to disguise a stolen vehicle's true identity thereby making it almost impossible for police and transport agencies to detect suspect vehicles. Hyundai and Nissan's adoption of this new technology represents a major breakthrough in the drive for an improved baseline in vehicle identification technology. The label, developed by Identitek Systems in Melbourne, is the only one to pass the NMVTRC's stringent testing requirements, guaranteeing the label:

- cannot be transferred between vehicles (or the information on it altered) without easy detection;
- cannot be copied, and is easy to authenticate in the field by non-scientific, non-destructive and practicable means; and
- is long lasting and damage resistant under typical in-vehicle environmental conditions.

This sensible and cheap technology, costing less than \$2 per vehicle, represents a significant improvement from traditional metal compliance plates. PrixCar – the vehicle preparation centre used by many importers to ready vehicles for their dealer networks – advises that the fitting process is far more efficient than the metal compliance plate and they expect many of their client companies to adopt the label over coming months.

The label is also being used in the performance and prestige market by Holden Special Vehicles and Audi is progressively changing over to the label with model updates. Police and transport agency personnel across the country will be provided with a special viewing lens needed to confirm the label's authenticity in the field.

The NMVTRC commends Identitek Systems on its innovation and persistence and Hyundai and Nissan for paving the way for future manufacturers to adopt this valuable and innovative contribution to tackling profit-motivated vehicle theft.



A secure compliance label is fitted to a vehicle at PrixCar.



An example of a secure compliance label for Hyundai vehicles.

Community attitudes to car theft

The NMVTRC places a strong emphasis on measurable outcomes and the delivery of high quality monitoring and evaluation processes. Consequently, we have periodically conducted consumer research in order to determine key changes in community attitudes to vehicle theft. In light of the significant overall reduction in theft since 2001 and increases in the immobilised fleet, the 2008 survey will be the most comprehensive conducted since 2000.

The survey will poll 1,200 motorists across Australia on their:

- perceptions of motor vehicle theft relative to other crimes; and
- level of awareness of vehicle security practices and vehicle theft issues (including concern of having their vehicle stolen, taking precautionary measures before purchasing a vehicle, rating of anti-theft measures, locking and security practices, beliefs regarding immobiliser effectiveness and cost, and types of vehicles stolen and offending groups).

The survey will aim to determine differing attitudes to vehicle theft and buying a vehicle depending on the age of the vehicle owned by the respondent.

The 2008 survey will provide vital input into the review of our public education material and guidance for future community based education projects. Interviews for the survey have already commenced, with the final report expected to be made available in August.

ACT immobiliser scheme now available to all

This month marks the second phase of the ACT Government's program to encourage the owners of older vehicles to fit an engine immobiliser. From November 2007, the ACT has provided financial assistance to recipients of a Centrelink pension to help them protect their vehicle. However, from 1 July an extended program announced by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Simon Corbell, makes a \$100 rebate available to all ACT residents. The scheme aims to install 5,000 engine immobilisers over the next two years. All installations must be carried out by members of the NMVTRC's *Immobilise Now!* network of professional installers.



Adam Lubinski of BDL Car Stereo and the ACT Minister for Police and Emergency Management, Simon Corbell at the announcement of the expanded program.

U-turn Q to close despite its success

The NMVTRC was saddened to learn that *U-turn* Queensland will close its doors in August after being unable to secure ongoing funding from the Queensland Government.

The NMVTRC has always viewed the Slack's Creek site operated by the YMCA as the nation's outstanding performer in helping get the lives of young car theft offenders going the way they would really wish, whilst helping to reduce the impact of car crime on the community.

The program's sudden demise is especially surprising given the very high standards of

participation, completion and relapse prevention it has maintained since its establishment as a pilot program, with NMVTRC and Australian Government funding in 2003. In 2006 it was awarded the Outstanding Achievement in Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction by the International Association of Auto Theft Investigators.

The NMVTRC remains of the view that the *U-turn* model represents the most effective form of diversionary intervention for car crime offenders and will continue to look for opportunities to promote its value to the juvenile justice community and others.

IAATI's 56th Annual Training Seminar 2008



A final reminder that IAATI's 56th International Annual Training Seminar will be held from 3-7 August at the Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre. IAATI has assembled an extensive program of expert speakers from Australia

and around the globe. Day registration is available from \$275, with a four day pass costing \$705. For more information go to www.iaatiaus.org