



National Motor Vehicle  
Theft Reduction Council  
*driving down vehicle theft*

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## In this issue

Containing vehicle theft in an  
'economic crisis'

New Car-Safe resources refreshed  
and ready

Local Councils bouncing back in 2009

Queensland Police focus attention  
on local and national theft issues

Bait cars upgraded as auto theft falls  
in British Columbia

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# theft torque

## Containing vehicle theft in an 'economic crisis'

Since peaking in 2000/01 motor vehicle theft has enjoyed unprecedented improvement with an overall decrease of more than 50 per cent in total theft numbers. These years of falling thefts have coincided with a period of consistent economic growth and prosperity; a situation that we have seen change dramatically over the last year.

Most commentators agree there are some types of economically motivated crimes that are more likely to be impacted by difficult economic conditions, with periods of good economic performance (growing real average weekly earnings and low unemployment) helping to deliver lower rates of property crime. Motor vehicle theft, insurance fraud disguised as theft and staged accidents are all crimes that fit into this economically motivated category and are likely to be impacted by the downturn.

Short term theft of passenger and light commercial vehicles (PLCs) (which make up around 80-85 per cent of all thefts) has consistently fallen since its peak in 2000/01, with thefts declining another 7 per cent in 2008 to fewer than 55,000. Despite these reductions, challenges remain for improving short term theft results in worsening economic conditions, with around five million unsecured vehicles still in the Australian fleet and the emerging trend towards theft of keys and transponders to steal immobilised vehicles. Further challenges lie in the field of youth recidivist offending, where despite impressive results demonstrated by the 'U-Turn' program, these types of crime specific youth diversionary initiatives struggle to attract mainstream funding.

The area of most pressing concern to the NMVTRC and its industry based stakeholders is the way profit-motivated thieves have continued to ply their trade despite major improvements in both public policy and infrastructure, which has seen the traditional re-birthing methods virtually

eliminated. The number of non-recovered PLC vehicles declined 19 per cent between 2001 and 2004 as a result of these reforms but 6 per cent of those gains has now been lost due to profit motivated thieves being able to adapt their methodologies. Non-recovered vehicles valued at more than \$5,000 totalling an estimated \$116 million disappeared in 2008. We have also seen an increase in the proportion of older vehicles stolen and not recovered, with 46 per cent of all non-recovered PLCs valued at less than \$5,000 in 2008.

Motorcycle theft presents its own particular dynamic. In 2001, 6,200 motorcycles were reported stolen, comprising around 4 per cent of all thefts. In 2008 this figure has risen to 7,800 motorcycles stolen, resulting in 11 per cent of all thefts. Slightly more than half of all motorcycle thefts are unregistered, off-road bikes and the consistently low recovery rate of around 34 per cent has offset many of the gains that have been made in non-recovered PLC theft.

The profits that are derived from organised crime are not immune to the economic downturn. Similar to a legitimate business the response of profit motivated thieves will be to try even harder to maintain and grow their returns. The central ongoing challenge of addressing profit-motivated theft is to be able to meet the adaptability of these highly motivated thieves who are able to integrate their illegal activities into the fringe and sometimes mainstream automotive industry. This includes the illegal disposal of vehicles and parts through the unregulated private sales market, infiltration into the recycling and repair industries, rebuilding of written-off vehicles, scrap disposal and export. There is a significant risk that recent reductions in vehicle crime will stall or even reverse if these difficult economic times divert our collective attention too far away from these illegal activities.

*continues overleaf*

# Containing vehicle theft in an 'economic crisis' continued

The answer lies in being able to create cost effective barriers that expose and deter these illegal activities without unduly disrupting legitimate business practices.

With the economic downturn impacting all of our stakeholders, demonstrating return on investment in the form of the economic and social benefits that flow from reduced vehicle crime becomes even more critical for maintaining stakeholder engagement in vehicle theft reform.

These challenges will provide the background for our upcoming Strategic Planning workshops, which commence in Melbourne in late April before heading to all capital cities. The StratPlan forums

are the major input into the NMVTRC's annual Strategic Plan and they help us develop a shared vision of reform priorities with our government and industry stakeholders. Importantly, the forums are also an avenue for our many diverse stakeholders to gain an appreciation of the challenges and implementation issues facing other industries and agencies.

We invite you to participate in this important process.

The dates and venues for 2009 are:

- Melbourne, 28 April – Marriott Hotel
- Hobart, 29 April – Hobart Function and Conference Centre

- Adelaide, 5 May – The Sebel Playford
- Perth, 6 May – Duxton Hotel
- Brisbane, 12 May – Sofitel
- Darwin, 13 May – Crowne Plaza
- Sydney, 19 May – Grace Hotel
- Canberra, 20 May – Crowne Plaza

Invitations for the 2009 StratPlan Forums have been forwarded via chief executives and senior managers of all our stakeholder organisations. If you would like to participate in a forum but have not seen the NMVTRC's invitation please contact us for details.

## New Car-Safe resources refreshed and ready

Our popular suite of Car-Safe public education brochures have a fresh new look, with a new series of five brochures available to order. The new look is the result of a telephone survey of 1,200 motorists commissioned last year which indicated that despite community awareness of the reality of vehicle theft and the effectiveness of immobilisers, there remains a lack of personal connection to the risk and hence a lack motivation to take extra precautions to reduce that risk.

The new brochures alert motorists to the inconveniences to family, work and social lives that having a vehicle stolen can cause, and provide information on tips to reduce the risk of theft, immobilisers, precautions to take when purchasing a used vehicle, and the facts about vehicle theft with force.

The brochures, along with A3 size posters featuring the older design, are available free of charge. A resource order form can be downloaded from our website, [www.carsafe.com.au](http://www.carsafe.com.au)



Examples of two of the most popular Car-Safe educational brochures.

# Local councils bouncing back in 2009

*Operation Bounce Back* has kicked off for 2009, with a total of 11 local councils confirming their involvement in the program's first 'flight' for the year. The fifth year of the program sees two rounds for the year, determined by the peak period of vehicle theft risk for each of the local government areas. The municipalities participating in the first round are:

- Bankstown (NSW)
- Blacktown (NSW)
- Liverpool (NSW)
- Campbelltown (NSW)
- Glenorchy (TAS)
- Clarence (TAS)
- Salisbury (SA)
- Playford (SA)
- Logan (QLD)
- Stirling (WA)
- Canning (WA)

Community events and information days for all municipalities are scheduled over the next couple of months, with Logan City Council and Clarence City Council already reporting strong attendance and community support at their respective program launches.

It is expected that a total of 25 councils will be offered grants for the year. Past programs have

seen participating municipalities achieve reductions in theft greater than their state averages. We are positive that the innovative ideas and enthusiasm expressed in funding applications, coupled with the continued support of businesses, police and other community partners, will ensure the program remains fresh and continues to build on the successes of the past four years.



*Young people getting involved at the launch of Clarence City Council's Operation Bounce Back program.*

# Queensland Police focus attention on local and national theft issues

The Queensland Police Service's State Crime Operations Command hosted a two day vehicle crime conference in February to examine local and national trends in vehicle crime. The 'Vehicle Crime Conference 09' attracted over 70 participants representing the insurance industry, motor trades, transport, office of fair trading and local and interstate police.

A panel of expert presenters drawn from police, insurance investigation, and forensic disciplines highlighted the challenges of combating current and emerging methodologies of vehicle crime and related fraud activities and detailed a selection of successful investigations that have occurred over the past year.

A broad range of issues were examined that included; the changing face of illegal 'chop shops', the emerging threat of staged accidents, theft of motorcycles in the racing scene, motor vehicle arson, plant and equipment theft, theft for scrap value and the growing reliance by organised criminals on stolen parts distribution. The specialist knowledge that was shared at the conference is sure to assist all participants to play their part in vehicle crime reduction more effectively.

As part of the NMVTRC's commitment to facilitating improved investigative responses to vehicle crime, the NMVTRC sponsored an additional day's policing workshop so that the Queensland and interstate

police specialist investigators who attended the conference could exchange operational intelligence on current criminal activities and investigative responses across the nation.



*Delegates at the Police Investigative Workshop in Queensland.*

# Bait cars upgraded as auto theft falls in British Columbia



An example of a typical bait car being broken into.

The number of vehicles stolen in British Columbia (BC) dropped 16 per cent between 2007 and 2008, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and once again the force is crediting the *Bait Car* program. Since the program was created in 2003, the number of stolen cars has dropped 47 per cent from 25,500 to 13,400, the RCMP said.

The *Bait Car* program uses specially equipped vehicles to catch car thieves. Once the car is stolen, police can track it and remotely shut down the engine, while all the activity inside is recorded on hidden cameras.

The Solicitor General also revealed that a new upgrade will allow the cars to stream live audio and video information to police while a chase is underway.

"This means that a dispatcher will watch and listen to everything that is going on inside a bait car in real time, and instantly relay the information to responding police units," he said.

The Solicitor General said the new technology is a huge improvement to officer safety because police now might know whether the thief is armed, before stopping the car and making an arrest.

Previously police had to wait until they stopped the car before they could download the recording of the inside activity.

The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) credits the drop in auto theft for cuts in insurance rates.

"Since launching the *Bait Car* program in 2003, we've seen auto theft claims fall by about \$40 million," said ICBC's senior vice-president of insurance, marketing and underwriting.

Police said the most stolen vehicles in BC remain the Ford F-series trucks from 1999 to 2006 and the Honda Civic from 1991 to 2000. (*reprinted from CBC.CA, April 1 2009*)

## The Australian bait car experience

While *Bait Car* programs are used from time to time in various Australian jurisdictions our police services have a more cautious approach to the public safety and liability aspects of their use than their Canadian and US counterparts. Bait cars used here are immobilised so that once the offender is inside they are unable to move the car. This ensures that there is no possibility that an innocent bystander will be injured or property damaged by the offender's

potentially reckless driving before the police are in a position to intercept.

While this means that our bait cars require covert police surveillance so that the offender can be arrested once he/she is inside the car, the NMVTRC supports the view that public safety must be the first priority. While some may consider the Australian bait car model to be more resource intensive it has proven to be a very effective way of focusing police resources on areas and vehicle models of high risk and they provide undeniable evidence of the offender's intentions. In South Australia where they have been used extensively, bait cars have been shown to have up to three times the arrest rate than equivalent time spent on general patrols; and have led to considerable savings in court time due to offenders' guilty pleas. They can also be a valuable deterrence tool when used in conjunction with a local publicity campaign.

If you would like to see examples of the Canadian bait cars in action go to [www.baitcar.com](http://www.baitcar.com)