



National Motor Vehicle
Theft Reduction Council
driving down vehicle theft

Theft TORQUE

National Motor Vehicle
Theft Reduction Council –
No.26 October 2006

Contents

[Mini Annual Report](#)

[In the News...](#)

[Young Motorists and Vehicle Security](#)

[Operation Bounce Back – Get Ready for 2006/07!](#)

[Youth Education Resources Trial](#)

Mini Annual Report

The NMVTRC Annual Report for 2005/06 will be available from the website (www.carsafe.com.au) from the start of November onwards. Alternatively, please contact us at info@carsafe.com.au if you would like to request a hard copy. Here is a short-form version featuring the main highlights of the year.

Motor Vehicle Theft in Australia

The 2005/06 financial year saw Australia further improving its theft position, with rates per 1,000 population and registrations down to 3.7 and 5.2 respectively. Total thefts reduced by 8 per cent, with 78 per cent of stolen vehicles (excluding motorcycles) recovered by the end of June. Older vehicles remain the most popular targets, however immobilisation rates have increased to almost 50 per cent. The reduction in theft numbers has saved the community an estimated \$44 million to \$83 million¹.

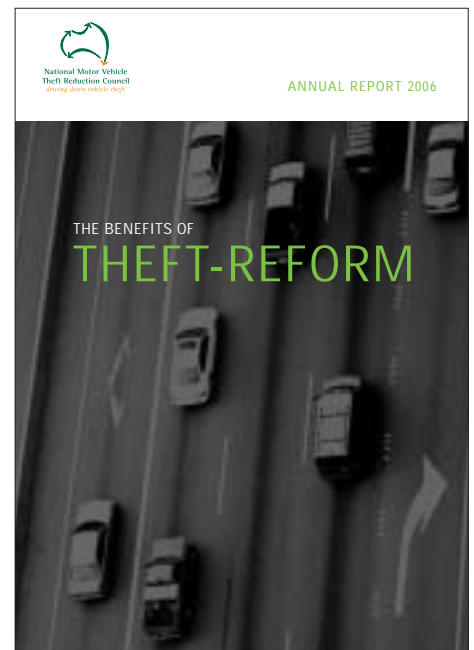
Reform Activity

The NMVTRC has engaged with stakeholders on a number of reforms this year, which will be outlined briefly in the following paragraphs – structured roughly according to theft motivation, with opportunistic theft reforms introduced first, followed by those directed at professional theft.

The NMVTRC involved itself in a number of reforms to address opportunistic theft in Australia this year, including *Operation Bounce Back*, *Australia's Most Wanted*, *Immobilise Now!* and the *U-turn* young offenders' program.

Australia's Most Wanted (AMW), the NMVTRC's flagship communications program, wrapped up in the first part of the year, with media events in Canberra, Brisbane, and Adelaide. The NMVTRC's *Immobilise Now!* program has also been gaining momentum, with installer networks receiving increased exposure through *Operation Bounce Back*.

The *U-turn* young offender program is another NMVTRC initiative aimed at driving down the level of opportunistic theft in Australia. Now operating



2005/06 Annual Report front cover.

in three sites across Australia, *U-turn* involves young vehicle theft offenders in a 10-week program aimed at developing practical automotive repair skills and improving vocational and education opportunities. Notably, *U-turn* Queensland this year won the 2006 International Association of Auto Theft Investigators' (IAATI) award and was later given additional funding by the Australian Government to continue through to the end of 2008. *U-turn* Tasmania has also secured funding from the Tasmanian Government to run to 2010, and both sites will continue their excellent work with young offenders beyond their initial NMVTRC-funded trial periods.

In addition to the NMVTRC's opportunistic theft reform activities, much work was done to address professional theft, for example through vehicle and component identification, best practice in parts recycling, secure registration practices, improved consumer access to vehicle information, effective investigative responses by police, and applying strategic responses to fraudulent practices.

Mini Annual Report continued

Good news with respect to whole of vehicle marking, with prestigious vehicle marques Lexus and Lotus joining those that already use microdot technology – considered by the NMVTRC to be the ‘gold standard’ in vehicle identification. Additionally, an alliance with AusIndustry will allow the possibility of an online application system to be explored for just-in-time manufacturing environments.

The NMVTRC’s independent association aimed at administering a Code of Practice for parts traders has gained increased support across Australia this year. National Parts Code Inc. (NPC) membership is now up to 130 businesses nationally, which is closer to the required 200 businesses needed to meet the demand from insurance smash repair networks. Support is also increasing from the insurance industry, with many major insurers having made a commitment to support the initiative by their approved repairer networks.

Secure registration practices are an important part of combating professional vehicle theft, with reforms relating to the monitoring of systems performance by transport agencies and improvements in the management of written-off vehicles given a lot of attention by the NMVTRC and its stakeholders this year.

Consumer access to vehicle information is a crucial part of effective reform of vehicle theft for profit, and the NMVTRC set out to ensure that access to information regarding a vehicle’s history is available to all consumers and motor traders. The NMVTRC has also been pushing for a national register of encumbered vehicles system that provides access to encumbrance, stolen, and written-off data that maintains a high level of consistency and accessibility.

Another challenge to effective vehicle theft reform is ensuring that police investigative responses are at a high level, and the NMVTRC’s Insurance Fraud Risk Assessment Group (IFRAG) allows law enforcement representatives to share observations about changing theft and fraud trends. IFRAG, formed in December 2005, will work towards: allowing insurers to cross-check client vehicle data with registration systems; assuring the competency and probity of contract insurance investigators; developing a national claims database; improving police responses to insurer referrals; and securing an online forum for information exchange relating to changing MO’s.

1. *Based on independent economic analysis conducted by MM Starrs Pty Ltd for the NMVTRC (September 2005) which estimated victims’ costs per incident to be in the range of \$6,230 to \$11,920 depending on a range of personal and other factors.*

In the News...

Generous Car Thieves and Unwitting Accomplices

As any vehicle theft victim can tell you, the consequences of having your car stolen are very serious. Financial loss, the inconvenience of losing the vehicle, disruption to daily activities such as work and home life, increased fear or paranoia about theft and crime in general – these are just some of the outcomes that can result from a theft.

Which is why the following occurrence was a welcome anomaly for one particular motorist. A ‘lucky’ victim from Auckland, New Zealand had her vehicle stolen in July of this year – only to have it returned after a week with a brand new battery, wheels, steering column, and glove box! Her worst nightmare that the vehicle would have been completely destroyed by the thieves turned into a very unexpected, but not unwelcome, surprise.

Source: The Age, 8 July 2006.

In a converse example of generosity from the United States, a group of helpful locals went to surprising lengths to assist a young would-be car thief in his rather unprepared attempts at stealing what was most likely his very first car. The unwitting accomplices rallied together to push the car down the street, however this was still not enough help for the 14 year old who needed further assistance

to operate the manual transmission. The boy was picked up by police soon after, along with an unsuspecting local woman who had offered an impromptu driving lesson.

Source: The Associated Press/East Valley Tribune, September 2006.

Thieves Make Off With Half a Million Dollars Worth of Trucks and Equipment

A group of thieves collected close to half a million dollars worth of trucks, trailers, and landscaping equipment from the Glen Eira City Council depot earlier this year. The thefts reminded vehicle owners of the huge cost to owners of heavy vehicle theft.

The NMVTRC is looking to investigate this phenomenon further, in order to protect owners of these extremely high cost vehicles that are often not properly protected from theft. Future reforms will likely be aimed at improved vehicle identification in a category of vehicle theft that, although rare, is very costly to the industry.

Source: Victoria Police Media Release, 17 August 2006.

Power Pup One

‘Microchipping’ your dog can help quickly reunite you and your stray pooch if he or she

goes a wandering. But in a strange twist from the United Kingdom, a pet and vehicle owner recently discovered exactly how durable an engine immobiliser microchip can be. After changing the battery in her electronic key fob, the woman found she was unable to start her car. She rang the AA for help, who upon closer inspection pointed out that her key-fob was missing its microchip. The confused vehicle owner had a think, and then recalled she had seen her dog eating something peculiar earlier. Fido was summoned to sit in the driver’s seat and lo and behold – the engine started.

Source: BBC News, 26 September 2006.

Power Pup Two

Whilst the woman in the previous story found her dog to have a positive interest in vehicle security, the opposite seemed to be the case with one Melbourne canine, who surprised local authorities when it was claimed he had ‘car-jacked’ an unsuspecting vehicle owner in Croydon one weekend. The dog reportedly jumped into the stranger’s car at the local shopping centre, refusing to get out – much to the disbelief of the vehicle owner. ‘Chevy’, a Staffordshire bull terrier, was escorted to the local police station for questioning before being bailed out by his embarrassed owner.

Source: Victoria Police Media Release, 6 October 2006.

Young Motorists and Vehicle Security



Young people represent a large proportion of victims as well as offenders.

Young people remain a particularly important demographic when it comes to vehicle theft, largely because they often choose older vehicles with poor security as their first car. The ease with which these vehicles can be broken into and started up, combined with the fact that most students tend to park their vehicles in high risk areas such as in CBD areas, means that this group is particularly vulnerable to theft.

Unfortunately, young people are still reluctant to invest in the proper security to protect their cars. Financial strain, unfamiliarity with engine immobilisers and security in general, and misconceptions about certain devices are a few of the many factors that deter young people from protecting their cars.

In order to investigate this issue further, the NMVTRC is conducting some research into young motorists' attitudes to, and knowledge of, vehicle theft. With the help of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), we hope to find

out more about exactly how aware young people are of the true nature of vehicle theft, and why they are so reluctant to protect their vehicles. Furthermore, we hope that this project will provide some insight as to what motivators exist that might encourage young motorists to fit engine immobilisers to their cars.

Preliminary results suggest that cost is still a strong barrier to investing in engine immobilisers for students who often have a range of pressures in their day to day lives which relate to out of home living. Finding the time to research different products and scheduling in a time that they can be without their car is also a concern, with many participants unaware that an installation can be done in as little as an hour.

A general lack of awareness is another main deterrent to young motorists, as many are worried about getting ripped off or investing in a device that is more sophisticated than they need. Vehicle security devices and mechanisms are often very

alien concepts to young motorists who are still not all that familiar with specifics.

Despite research that supports the premise that young motorists are a particularly high-risk demographic, an interesting outcome of the discussions was that the high levels of vehicle theft in Australia do not resonate with motorists. When presented with the fact that one in 70 Australian households fall victim to vehicle theft each year, participants stated that this figure seemed very high based on their personal experiences. This says to us that we need to examine the ways in which we can make data around vehicle theft more meaningful to young people.

The NMVTRC hopes to continue this project throughout the end of 2006 to gain further insight in the attitudes and opinions of this particular demographic.

Operation Bounce Back – Get Ready for 2006/07!



Geoff Hughes at the launch of the City of Glenorchy's (Tasmania) innovative TV ads.

Eighteen grant recipients have now wrapped up their *Operation Bounce Back* (OBB) programs for 2005/06, with three programs continuing into the final months of 2006. The publicity driven, public education based program engages with local

government and police to raise community awareness about vehicle theft and security. The program also involves immobiliser give-aways, directed at recent victims of theft and owners of high-risk vehicles.

With more than 1,100 immobilisers installed to date through the 2005/06 program, and almost 68,000 vehicle theft brochures distributed by grant recipients, the program was a huge success. Grant recipients reported that collaborations with police and local community agencies were particularly helpful, and these relationships were perceived to be enduring. Excellent use was made of the NMVTRC's public education materials, and the *Immobilise Now!* installers were commended for their commitment and enthusiasm. Positive results were achieved in particular by all completed follow-up grants, with theft reductions in these LGAs well exceeding their respective state averages.

Following another successful *Operation Bounce Back* program, the NMVTRC is currently making plans for the 2006/07 program. As usual, the selection process begins with a statistical analysis of local government areas and statistical local areas across Australia. Those areas experiencing high theft levels in each state will be noted, and a vehicle age profile will be carried out. *Operation Bounce Back* focuses on older vehicles with poor security, so those areas with a high distribution of older cars registered will be prioritised when offers are made.

A new factor will be introduced in the selection process for 2006/07. Bearing in mind that overall theft numbers should be considered in the context of the size of the LGA population, we hope to try and include theft rates per 1,000 population as a consideration as well.

Youth Education Resources Trial

An evaluation of the NMVTRC's successful Streetwise Communications education materials, the *Spur of the Moment* comic and *Ride of Your Life* animation in late 2005, concluded that the resources had served their purpose well, but could use some updating. Feedback from young people suggested that the medium be shifted towards more 'real life' documentary style package. With the objective of optimising value for money, the NMVTRC has set out to determine whether a couple of quality existing international materials could be successfully applied to the Australian context.

Two programs from the United Kingdom were identified which address the legal and life consequences of involvement in vehicle theft. They are aimed at young people between the ages of 13 to upwards of 18 years old. They will be evaluated by groups of young people in Tasmania, Victoria, and New South Wales (NSW) about how well they translate to the Australian scene.

Focus group testing with the first two groups of participants in Tasmania concluded earlier this month. With the invaluable help of Glenorchy City Council (GCC), two focus groups were run with a mix of volunteer young people from local community

programs *Pulse* and *Chance on Main*, the Glenorchy Safer Communities Committee, the GCC Youth Taskforce and the Glenorchy Youth Precinct groups.

A great amount of useful and insightful feedback on the two programs was received from all of the young people involved, and the NMVTRC highly appreciates their contribution. The comments and discussions will be used to shape our future directions with respect to programs and resources directed at young people. The Victorian and NSW trials are expected to be completed by the end of 2006.



National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council Inc

50-52 Howard Street
North Melbourne Victoria 3051
Australia

Telephone (03) 9348 9600
Facsimile (03) 9348 9988
Email info@carsafe.com.au

www.carsafe.com.au

NMVTRC newsletters are reproduced on the CAR-SAFE website at www.carsafe.com.au and are also available electronically. To join our email list contact info@carsafe.com.au