

Motorists concerned about rise in auto thefts

By Mark PavilonsEditor

The rise in auto thefts across the GTA has motorists concerned and the statistics are staggering. But, police forces across Ontario are combining resources to curb this illegal activity. According to a survey conducted on behalf of CAA Insurance Company, a growing number of Ontarians have significant concerns about vehicle theft. The findings indicate that almost half of respondents (47 per cent) are very concerned about auto theft. That number increases to 57 per cent for those living in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In contrast, those who live in either Northern (14 per cent) or Southwestern Ontario (10 per cent) were less worried about auto theft. As an organization, we are deeply concerned about the rising trend of auto theft in Ontario and across the country. The survey results highlight the urgency of taking comprehensive action to protect our communities, said Elliott Silverstein, director of government relations, CAA Insurance Company. While many of those surveyed are concerned about the increase in vehicle theft, far fewer (30 per cent) are worried that their vehicle is at risk of getting stolen. This discrepancy suggests that many Ontarians may have a false sense of security when trusting that their cars are not at risk of being stolen. In most cases, basic auto theft prevention does not go far enough. According to the Solicitor General of Ontario, a car is stolen every 48 minutes. From 2014 to 2021, there was a 72 per cent increase in auto theft across the province, with a 14 per cent increase in the last year alone. While many people are diligent about locking their doors, basic auto theft prevention does not go far enough. Eighty-two per cent of drivers are ensuring their vehicle is always locked. Seventy-seven per cent of drivers ensure valuables are out of sight. Nearly 50 per cent of drivers park their cars in locked garages. Six per cent of drivers use a steering wheel lock, and only 8 per cent use a Faraday box to block the transmission of RFID signals. Auto theft can happen to anyone, and drivers need to do more than just lock their doors to make their vehicle difficult to steal. We are urging Ontarians to take additional preventive measures to safeguard their vehicles, making them less appealing targets for thieves, adds Silverstein. Along with other police services across the Greater Toronto Area, York Region has seen a rise in vehicle thefts. These thefts, according to York Regional Police, frequently occur in residential driveways, especially overnight between midnight and 6 a.m. YRP's Auto/Cargo Theft Unit is working hard to combat vehicle thefts and, as recently highlighted in the media, officers have made several arrests, laid numerous charges and recovered many stolen vehicles. Despite our successes, auto theft is a lucrative crime that remains a major concern and our investigators are being kept busy, said a YRP spokesperson. CAA offers tips that can help deter vehicle theft: Secure your parked vehicle with an anti-theft deterrent such as a steering wheel lock, brake pedal lock or wheel & tire lock device like The Club. Store your key fob in a Faraday box/pouch to block its signal from being hacked. Lock your doors and if you have a garage, park your vehicle inside. If you have multiple vehicles, park the less expensive one closest to the street. Install motion sensors on your driveway and a camera to capture any activity. Cover the VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) so that it's not visible on the dashboard. Store an Air Tag in your vehicle to track your vehicle should it be stolen. Ensure items are out of sight and do not leave valuables in your vehicle at all. Never leave your vehicle running. CAA Insurance believes that to combat auto theft properly; it will require collaboration with the government, insurers, vehicle manufacturers, and others, including Canada Border Services Agency. YRP also offers some tips to curb the potential of auto theft: Park in a secure garage when possible. Use an anti-theft device when parking your vehicle, especially something visible and effective such as a steering wheel lock. Keep your key fob far away from the car when it is parked and protect its signal from being intercepted by storing it in a container or wrap that blocks transmissions. Install a blocker on the vehicle's data port and prevent access to the vehicle's computer that thieves can use to steal the car and reprogram keys. Use your parking brake, which can make it a bit more difficult for thieves to tow a vehicle away. Consider using a good quality video surveillance system where you park. If you see suspicious activity, trust your instincts and call the police.