

PREVENTING AUTO BREAK-INS

Are your valuables **VISIBLE**?

🚗 **Don't leave valuables in your car.** This may sound like common sense, but drivers and/or passengers often leave items of value in plain view every day. If you leave valuable items visible in your car, your car may already be a target.

🚗 **If you must leave valuable items in your car while out and about, place them out of sight *before* reaching your destination or move them to an inconspicuous location.** This includes packages, backpacks, gym bags, GPS units, MP3 players, monies, etc. You may be observed putting items under a seat or throwing something over them. You never know who may be watching your activities.

🚗 **If you can't take your valuables with you, at least lock the items out of sight, such as in your glove compartment, (if capable of locking and large enough) or your trunk, (if you have one).** One reason SUVs and pickups are common targets is because they don't have trunks to hold valuables. The driver/passenger generally just hide their valuables out of sight. The thieves know this, and will check unlocked glove compartments, behind and under seats. After all it only takes a few seconds to check all the *usual* hiding places.

🚗 **Lock everything of value in the trunk.** Avoid leaving packages or shopping bags visible in your car — again lock them in the trunk out of sight. Plan your shopping/errands so that you don't load your trunk until you are ready to drive to another destination; never open a trunk, place valuables inside, and then just walk away.

🚗 **Once home, unload your valuables immediately.** Do not store valuables in your car any longer than necessary, and *never* overnight.

🚗 **If your trunk can be opened from inside your car without a key, lock this feature** when you are not in your car or have it disabled, if possible.

🚗 **Leave no trace.** Don't leave any sign that there are valuables *out of sight* in your vehicle, such as docking stations, connector cables, or suction cup marks on the windshield or dashboard. Leave nothing in plain sight that might make your vehicle worth investigating by a thief; not even loose coins or a single CD.

♥ **Just leaving an empty docking station in plain sight,** even if you've taken the high dollar component with you, may end up costing you hundreds of dollars to replace a broken window, because the thief wanted to check your car for hidden valuables. Very few auto break-ins are random — the thieves see *something* in plain sight that's valuable, or hints of possible hidden valuables.

♥ **If you have an after-market stereo player with a removable faceplate, remove it.** Without the faceplate, the unit is less attractive/useful to many thieves, and harder to fence. If the unit can be pulled, pull it! Take it with you. Just covering a valuable radio (*or ANY valuables in your car*) with something (like a blanket or towel) to hide it will probably only draw a thief's attention.

🚗 **Try to park in busy, well-lighted areas.** Park in well-traveled areas as well. Large lots are hit by thieves much more often than small residential parking areas or other occupied buildings. On a busy day or night, picking your parking space is easier said than done —but try to choose a well-lit, visible, parking space where there is a lot of vehicular and/or pedestrian movement. Thieves prefer breaking into cars where they will not be observed or attract attention, and therefore choose their targets accordingly.

🚗 **Lock ALL your vehicles doors** even if you plan to be gone only a brief time. Every year, items are stolen from unlocked vehicles where the owner was only going to be gone "*just for a second.*" It only takes seconds to steal your valuables! It's not at all uncommon for thieves to walk down a row of parked vehicles and check vehicle doors to see if they are unlocked. Don't leave any window open or even cracked including vent/wing windows and sunroofs.

🚗 **Set any alarm or anti-theft device.** If you have one, use it! Many people believe that car-alarms no longer make a difference, but they can be an effective deterrent to a thief who most often chooses the easiest target. If they have two cars to choose from, one with an alarm and one without, they will likely burglarize the one without (unless you've left out valuables just too good to ignore!)

Even if locked and alarmed, if you leave valuables (or the hint of valuables) in plain sight, a thief may target your car, even knowing it's locked and alarmed. But, without a clear prize in sight, a locked/alarmed car will likely be bypassed for an easier opportunity. Don't think your dark tinted windows will hide your valuables. Thieves often use flashlights to see through tint, and after-market tint is handy to keep all the broken glass in one "sheet" when they break out your window.

Don't use "hide-a-keys." Thieves know where to look.

📞 **If you see suspicious activity,** report it to the Columbia Police Department at 803-252-2911 or if it is an emergency call **911**

🚗 **Suspicious Activity** would include but not limited to:

♥ Persons walking up and down aisles of parking lots looking into cars or trying door handles; vehicles cruising parking lots at very slow speeds for extended periods while observing parked cars.

♥ Persons sitting in parked cars (*engine running*) for extended periods of time or vehicles dropping one person off while continuing to cruise the same area.

What to do if something is stolen out of your car

Call the Columbia Police at **803-252-2911**

