

Carjacking—Don't Be a Victim

Carjacking is defined as seizure of a vehicle in transit either to rob it or divert it to an alternate destination. According to a U.S. Justice Department report, over 34,000 carjacking incidents occur annually in the U.S.

Forty-four percent of carjacking incidents occurred in an open area, such as on the street or near public transportation facilities including airports, bus and train stations. Twenty-four percent occurred in parking lots or garages near businesses such as stores, gas stations, office buildings, restaurants and bars.

Ninety-three percent of carjackings occurred in cities or suburbs. A weapon was used in 74 percent of carjackings. About 32 percent of victims of completed carjackings and 17 percent of victims of attempted carjackings were injured.

In only a quarter of carjackings was the vehicle and all property totally recovered.

You can help protect yourself against carjackers by becoming familiar with the methods, ruses, and locations that they commonly use.

Avoidance

The first step in avoiding an attack is to stay alert at all times and be aware of your environment. Be especially vigilant in the following situations:

- High crime areas
- Lesser traveled roads
- Intersections where you must stop

- Isolated areas in parking lots
- Residential driveways and gates
- Traffic jams or congested areas

Learn to avoid these areas and situations if possible. If not, take steps to prevent an attack.

When stopped, use your rear and side view mirrors to stay aware of your surroundings. This increases your safety and makes it more difficult for an attacker to surprise you.

Reduce your Chances of Carjacking

You can reduce your chances for carjacking by taking the following steps:

- When returning to a parked vehicle, assess the situation before getting in. Look into the backseat or passenger compartment for someone hiding in the vehicle.
- Keep doors locked and windows closed when driving.
- In traffic, look around for possible avenues of escape. Keep some distance between you and the vehicle in front so you can maneuver easily if necessary.
- When stopped, allow at least one car length between you and the car ahead. You should always be able to see the rear tires of the vehicle in front.

- If you can't drive away from a threatening situation, draw attention to yourself—honk your horn or yell. Remain locked inside if possible.
- Keep your valuables out of view while driving. Don't leave valuables on the seat where they can be observed from the outside.
- When stopping for fuel or refreshment turn off the ignition and take your keys when leaving the vehicle.
- Keep a lookout if you see a stranger approaching your vehicle. Drive away as quickly as possible.
- Above all, don't resist an armed suspect. Your vehicle isn't worth risking personal injury.

Tricks Often Used by Carjackers

Accidents are one ruse used by carjackers to trick their victim. The following are common attack plans:

The Bump—The attacker bumps the victim's vehicle from behind. The victim gets out to assess damage and exchange information. The victim's vehicle is taken.

The "Good Samaritan" —The attacker(s) stage what appears to be an accident. They may simulate an injury. The victim stops to assist and the vehicle is taken.

The Ruse—The vehicle behind the victim flashes its lights or the driver waves to get the victim's attention. The attacker tries to indicate that there is a problem with the victim's car. The victim pulls over and the vehicle is taken.

The Trap—Carjackers follow the limo driver victim to the customer's home. When the victim pulls into the driveway the attacker pulls up behind and blocks the victim's car.

If you are bumped from behind or if someone tries to alert you to a problem with your vehicle, pull over only when you reach a safe public place.

When picking up a customer try to park in the street instead of the customer's driveway if possible so you can not be blocked in. If you are driving into a gated community, call ahead to have the gate opened. Otherwise wait on the street until the gate is open before turning in and possibly getting trapped.

Think before stopping to assist in an accident. It may be safer to call and report the location, the number of cars involved and any injuries you observed.

Wait until you stop your vehicle in a safe place before using your cell phone. If you do stop at an accident scene, keep a safe distance away and make sure to position your vehicle so that you can drive away.

Always keep your cell phone with you and immediately alert someone regarding your situation.

During a Carjacking

The foremost concern is your personal safety and the safety of your passengers. If you are confronted by a carjacker don't resist. Hand over your keys and step back from the assailant. Remember: The vehicle can be replaced but a human life cannot.

In most carjacking situations, the attackers are interested only in the vehicle. Try to stay calm. Do not stare at the attacker because this may seem aggressive and cause them to harm you or your passengers. In most instances, it is probably safest to give up your vehicle.

After the Attack

Safety

If you are in a populated area, immediately go to a safe place. After an attack or an attempted attack, you might not be focused on your safety. Get to a safe place if it's possible to do so, before contacting someone to report the incident.

Reporting the Crime

Describe the event. What time of day did it occur? Where did it happen? How did it happen? Who was involved?

Describe the attacker(s). Without staring, try to note height, weight, scars or other marks, hair and eye color, the presence of facial hair, build (slender, large), and complexion (dark, fair).

Describe the attacker's vehicle. If possible get the vehicle license number, color, make, model, and year, as well as any marks (scratches, dents, damage) and personal decorations (stickers, colored wheels).

The golden rule for descriptions is to give only that information you absolutely remember. If you are not sure, don't guess!

Conclusion

Avoidance is the best way to prevent a carjacking. Use your judgment to evaluate the situation and possible reactions. Know safe areas to go to in an emergency. Always carry your cell phone.

Non-confrontation is often the best response. The objective is not to thwart the criminal but to survive.

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