



Vehicle theft in Anchorage jumps 73 percent in 2016



By Travis Khachatoorian | Posted: Fri 7:27 PM, Jan 13, 2017



ANCHORAGE (KTUU) - Anchorage is facing a problem with grand theft auto, witnessing the highest number of stolen vehicles in at least the past five years.

In 2016, 2,117 vehicles were reported stolen to the Anchorage Police. That's 73 percent more than 2015, and almost two-and-a-half times the number of reports filed in 2012.

According to APD, officers are witnessing predatory behavior among thieves, with would-be criminals staking out

parking lots and apartment complexes.

“We spoke to a lady who went out and started up her car, turned around as she was walking inside the door of her apartment, and she could hear her car being driven away,” said APD public information officer Renee Oistad. “It’s that fast.”

Oistad said, the majority of vehicles were stolen after residents left them running unattended to warm them up during cold weather. She said, thieves are looking for an easy target, and any car with keys in the ignition, even if the doors are locked, is liable to be lost.

APD does not have the resources to respond to every car theft, so reports are typically taken over the phone. Oistad said, more than 90 percent of vehicles stolen in 2016 were eventually recovered, but finding the missing car is only half the battle.

The District Attorney’s office in Anchorage said their staff is currently handling more than 100 pending vehicle theft prosecutions, ranging from simple crimes of opportunity to more sophisticated theft rings.

But as assistant district attorney James Klugman explained, the burden of proof in car theft case can be complicated. He said just because someone is driving a stolen vehicle, doesn’t mean there’s enough to prove they stole that vehicle.

“Any case that we prosecute, we have to be able to prove the charges in court beyond a reasonable doubt, which is a very high standard,” said Klugman.

Even if prosecuted successfully, vehicle theft doesn’t necessarily come with any jail time in Alaska. After the crime reform bill SB 91 came into effect in July of 2016, the penalties for stealing a car were reduced across the board.

“I would say offenders are not necessarily getting sentenced to the same amount of jail time that they might have prior to July,” said Klugman.

Before SB 91, a convicted car thief with no prior felonies could be sentenced to two years in prison. Now, that same crime would only come with probation.

It’s a sentence, Klugman said, the Department of Law and the Department of Public Safety are expected to recommend change in next week’s Criminal Justice Commission meeting.

Both APD and the DA’s office said, there’s no clear reason behind why stolen vehicle reports spiked in 2016, and heading into 2017, neither could say if the problem will be slowing down.

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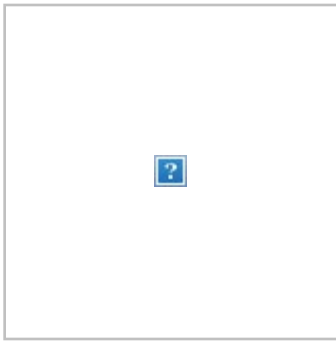


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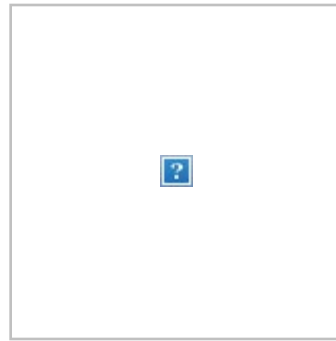
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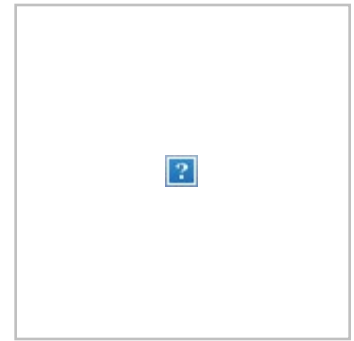
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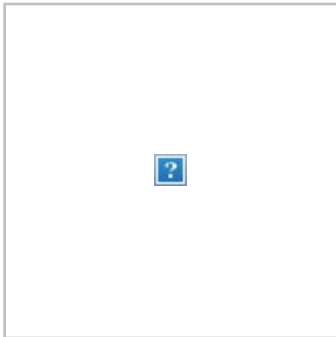
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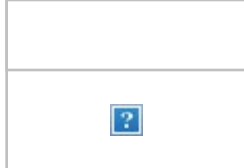
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