

Modesto, Calif., Regains Nation's Top Spot for Vehicle Thefts

by NAMIC

The National Insurance Crime Bureau reported April 22 that the Modesto, Calif., metropolitan statistical area (MSA) had the highest per capita rate for vehicle thefts in the nation in 2007.

For 2007, the 10 MSAs with the highest vehicle theft rates are:

- Modesto, Calif. (5)
- Las Vegas/Paradise, Nev. (1)
- San Diego/Carlsbad/San Marcos, Calif. (11)
- Stockton, Calif. (2)
- San Francisco/Oakland/Fremont, Calif. (12)
- Laredo, Texas (22)
- Albuquerque, N.M. (13)
- Phoenix/Mesa/Scottsdale, Ariz. (4)
- Yakima, Wash. (9)
- Tucson, Ariz. (10)

2006 ranking in parentheses

Each year, NICB analysts review vehicle theft data obtained from the National Crime Information Center for each of the nation's MSAs. MSAs are designated by the Office of Management and Budget and often include areas much larger than the cities for which they are named. For example, the Modesto MSA includes the entire county of Stanislaus and other municipalities in addition to the city of Modesto.

The rate is determined by the number of vehicle theft offenses per 100,000 inhabitants using the 2007 U.S. Census Population Estimates, the most current figures available.

Preliminary 2007 crime data released by the FBI in January contains some positive news on the vehicle theft front. Not only is 2007 on track to be the fourth consecutive year of declining vehicle thefts, but if the preliminary figure of -7.4 percent holds, it will be the largest single year percent drop in thefts since 1999, and it will contribute to the overall 11 percent reduction in vehicle thefts nationally since 2000.

However, the good news is no reason for vehicle owners or law enforcement to relax their vigilance. "While there is overall great news in our new report, there is also room for concern," said Robert M. Bryant, NICB president and CEO. "Success against vehicle theft can be fleeting without an ongoing and adaptive program that couples the best in theft prevention/recovery technology with law enforcement operations. We must not become complacent in the wake of success.

"Bait cars, license plate readers, and owner-applied theft deterrence and recovery systems have delivered outstanding results. In the coming years, technological advances may well defeat vehicle theft as a major crime problem in the United States, but until then we must continue using everything at our disposal to keep achieving the kinds of results that we have had over the last four years," Bryant said.

NICB recommends the following actions under its "layered approach" to vehicle theft protection:

Common sense - An unlocked vehicle with a key in the ignition is an open invitation to any thief, regardless of which anti-theft device you use. The common sense approach to protection is the simplest and most cost-effective way to thwart would-be thieves. Secure your vehicle even if parking for brief periods. You should always:

Remove your keys from the ignition

Lock your doors /close your windows

Park in a well-lit area

Warning device - The second layer of protection is a visible or audible device which alerts thieves that your vehicle is protected. Popular second layer devices include:

Audible alarms

Steering column collars

Steering wheel/brake pedal lock

Brake locks
Wheel locks
Tire locks/tire deflators
Theft deterrent decals
Identification markers in or on vehicle
VIN etching
Micro dot marking

Immobilizing device - The third layer of protection is a device which prevents thieves from bypassing your ignition and hot-wiring the vehicle. Some electronic devices have computer chips in ignition keys. Other devices inhibit the flow of electricity or fuel to the engine until a hidden switch or button is activated. Popular third-layer devices include:

Smart keys
Fuse cut-offs
Kill switches
Starter, ignition, and fuel pump disablers
Wireless ignition authentication

Tracking device - The final layer of protection is a tracking device that emits a signal to police or a monitoring station when the vehicle is stolen. Tracking devices are very effective in helping authorities recover stolen vehicles. Some systems employ "telematics" which combine GPS and wireless technologies to allow remote monitoring of a vehicle. If the vehicle is moved, the system will alert the owner and the vehicle can be tracked via computer.

Source: National Insurance Crime Bureau

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