



# PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 001-15

March 17, 2015

### VEHICLE BREAK-INS What You Need To Know

Billions of dollars' worth of personal items and accessories are stolen during vehicle break-ins each year. Additionally, thieves are also seeking to steal the victim's identity by taking identification and credit cards that are left in vehicles.

Pennsylvania has recently experienced a number of vehicle break-ins, specifically from the parking lots of gyms, stores, movie theaters, and hotels. Many individuals leave brief cases, purses, wallets, electronics, and other items unattended in vehicles when they are at the gym or shopping. Thieves capitalize on this type of activity by sitting in parking lots watching people or driving and walking through the parking lots looking for a target.<sup>1</sup> They focus on areas where owners will be away from their vehicles for an extended period of time.<sup>2</sup>

- On 02/04/2015 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a Florida woman was charged with four counts of identity theft and access device fraud after she broke into a vehicle and stole the victim's banking information. The suspect accessed the victim's financial accounts four times including cashing a forged check.<sup>3</sup>
- In January 2015, thieves entered numerous vehicles parked at a fitness center in Ridley Township, Pennsylvania and stole numerous personal items. The victim's credit cards were subsequently used to purchase more than \$1,300 worth of merchandise from a local department store.<sup>4</sup>

### PREVENTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These preventative measures will help reduce the chances of your vehicle becoming a target for break-ins.

- Lock your doors at all times.
- Close all windows and sunroofs.
- Park in a visible, well-lit area away from larger vehicles, fences or foliage.
- If you have an SUV or wagon-type vehicle, consider installing a retractable cover over the cargo area.
- Place bags and electronics, including power plugs, adapters, and suction cup mounts out of sight.
- Place valuables in the trunk when you return to your vehicle rather than after you arrive at your next location.<sup>5</sup>



RETRACTABLE COVER

If you are the victim of a vehicle break-in:

- File a police report.
- Alert your credit card providers of the theft to prevent fraudulent charges.
- Check your credit history and scores to make sure additional credit cards were not added using your identity.
- Consider adding a security alert to your credit history, which will provide additional protection if your Social Security number was stolen.<sup>6</sup>
- Report any stolen vehicle insurance card and vehicle registration to law enforcement, your insurance company, and the Department of Transportation. Thieves have been known to steal insurance and registration information and put them with stolen vehicles.

Individuals who witness a break-in or see a suspicious individual or vehicle should find a safe location to call 9-1-1. If you are the victim of a vehicle break-in, report the incident to police immediately.



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<sup>1</sup> CBS 21. (2015, January 31). Police warn about rash of vehicle break-ins. *CBS21*. Retrieved on 02/18/2015 from <http://www.local21news.com/news/features/top-stories/stories/police-warn-rash-vehicle-break-ins-15196.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup> Snyder, M. (2015, January 16). Middletown residents warned of car break-ins. *ABC27 News*. Retrieved on 02/18/2015 from <http://abc27.com/2015/01/16/middletown-residents-warned-of-car-break-ins/>.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, J. (2015, February 17) Member of infamous 'felony lane gang' stole local woman's bank information, state police say. *PennLive*. [http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2015/02/felony\\_lane\\_gang\\_planet\\_fitness.html](http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2015/02/felony_lane_gang_planet_fitness.html).

<sup>4</sup> CBS Philly. (2015, January 29). Police investigate car break-ins at Planet Fitness parking lot in Delaware County. *CBS Philly*. Retrieved on 03/17/2015 from <http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2015/01/29/police-investigate-car-break-ins-at-gym-parking-lot-in-delaware-county/>.

<sup>5</sup> Halvorson, B. (2009). Tips to prevent car break-ins. *CNN*. Retrieved on 02/18/2015 from <http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/wayoflife/04/15/aa.avoid.car.break.ins/>.

<sup>6</sup> Sweet, M. (2006, September 20). Credit advice: Breaking into cars to commit Identity Theft. *Experian*. Retrieved on 02/18/2015 from <http://www.experian.com/ask-experian/20060920-breaking-into-cars-to-commit-identity-theft.html>.