

Vehicle Theft Immobilization

Vehicle theft is a very serious concern for Canadians. Vehicle theft affects us all, insurance rates rise, everyone loses. In the past several years there have been over 170,000 vehicles stolen each year in Canada, or more than 460 vehicles each day. According to Statistics Canada, the rate of motor vehicle theft has grown a dramatic 71 percent since 1988, including over a 9 percent rise in 1996 alone.

Motor vehicles are generally stolen either for profit or for convenience. There are many innocent victims when a vehicle is stolen. The vehicle owner, the insurance company, and subsequent owners who unknowingly purchase stolen vehicles or stolen vehicle parts, all experience a loss. But more important, theft by young offenders frequently leads to collisions resulting in serious injuries and death.

Departmental funded studies indicate that vehicle theft is a serious road safety issue resulting in about 20 fatalities per year. Vehicle theft also has a significant impact on injury statistics and insurance premiums.

The Department has been working on several fronts to help combat vehicle theft. In addition to the introduction of immobilization systems, the Department has been instrumental in setting up procedures to assist in controlling the exchange of vehicle registrations for vehicles that are imported into Canada. This precludes the registration number of a vehicle that was destroyed in a collision from being applied to a stolen vehicle. With these procedures, it is now possible for the

provinces to verify whether the registration number of an imported vehicle was taken from a destroyed vehicle

The department has also recently introduced requirements for the vehicle identification plate to be permanently affixed to the vehicle. This introduction was a result of concerns from the insurance industry about the ease with which Vehicle Identification Number plates could be moved from one vehicle to another. It is expected that both the procedural change noted and the permanent plate application will assist in reducing vehicle theft for profit.

Departmental studies have shown that the most important aspect of road safety and vehicle theft is youth theft. Youth vehicle theft is a significant road safety concern. Youth theft poses a significant safety risk, as they do not have the driving skills and experience to operate a vehicle safely and are more likely to engage in risky behaviour.

The department's research indicates that the installation of immobilization systems, which make it difficult for the car engine to be started without the proper disabling device, will reduce vehicle theft, especially youth theft, and thus Transport Canada has introduced, under the *Motor Vehicle Safety Act* the requirements that new vehicles be equipped with immobilization systems by September 1, 2007.

The anti theft requirements include the option for the manufacturers to install immobilizer systems meeting either a Canadian (Underwriters Laboratory of Canada – ULC) or an international, United Nations standard. While the Canadian standard is perceived by some to be superior, the department is of the

opinion that they offer equivalent vehicle theft protection. There is a wide misunderstanding amongst stakeholders that there are significant differences between the two standards. There are not. This misunderstanding exists as many are not aware that the international standard has been amended in the recent past with increasingly more stringent requirements. In addition to introducing the latest, most stringent version, the department has added other requirements, thus aligning the effectiveness of the Canadian and international standards.

Both standards will meet the needs of Canadians, will be strong theft deterrents, will provide less incentive for our youth to go astray, will reduce expenses for Canadians by preventing property loss and injury and lowering insurance premiums, will encourage global harmonization by vehicle manufacturers, and will open the Canadian market to world suppliers.