

Common sense curbs Christmas car park crime

Don't advertise to thieves says AA Insurance

Auckland, 9 December 2014 – Over a third of Kiwis say they leave valuable possessions in their car, where they are vulnerable to opportunistic thieves, according to a recent AA Insurance survey.

The 2014 AA Insurance Drivers Index, which interviewed 1,000 regular Kiwi drivers aged 18+ years online, found that 38 per cent of respondents admitted they sometimes leave items such as laptops, iPods, GPS, bags or other valuables in their parked car. Younger drivers were more likely to leave their gear behind, with over half of all 18-24 year olds (52 per cent) saying they did this.

“If you leave valuable possessions in your car, especially if they are visible, you are providing a fast and simple way for thieves to do their own kind of Christmas shopping,” said Amelia Macandrew, Customer Relations Manager, AA Insurance.

According to claims data for the 12 months until 31 October, AA Insurance paid out over \$810,000 for thefts from car claims, with an average of \$1700 per claim. These were comparable to last year's figures.

“Our most common claims are personal items such as clothing, makeup and handbags, followed by mobile phones, then laptops and iPads,” said Amelia. “Although at this time of year it's not unusual for Christmas shopping, travel items, and even groceries to be stolen.”

While having your belongings stolen from your car is distressing, it's encouraging to know that the number of these types of recorded offences has decreased by more than 24,200 over the past nine years. New Zealand Police crime statistics report that there were 28,761 “theft-ex-cars” (theft of property from a car but not the car itself) in 2013/2014, compared to 52,997 in 2005/2006. Theft from cars made up 12.4 per cent of all crimes a decade ago, but has now dropped to only 8.1 per cent.

Most thefts are opportunistic and are often committed while drivers have left their cars for a short time. One customer had taken her dog for a walk along the beach. An hour later she returned to find the driver's side door open and over \$5,000 worth of contents taken including her mobile, camera, laptop, and personal items like cosmetics, sunglasses and hair straighteners.

“We often forget that the items we regularly carry with us can add up to hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars”, said Amelia. “If you were carrying the equivalent amount in cash, you’d likely do your best to protect it from being stolen. Yet we’re not as vigilant when it comes to looking after our everyday items that are often valuable and sentimental, like irreplaceable images on our phone.

“Our key message to Kiwis this holiday season is to keep these important possessions out of sight or, better yet, take them with you. If you put your possessions at significant risk, you could jeopardise your claim from being accepted.”

If your car is packed with your travel belongings, it not only makes sense to keep possessions out of view, it also pays to be careful where you park your car, as one out-of-town couple found out. The pair was on holiday when they decided to go to the zoo. They couldn’t find a space in the car park so left their rental on the street, before putting their belongings and new purchases in the boot. However, this didn’t stop thieves from popping the lock and taking property worth \$1500, including a full suitcase.

One final piece of advice from Amelia: “While you’re protecting your possessions, don’t forget to look after a relatively expensive one, your car. The holiday season can be a stressful time, so take your time when driving and parking, and use your mirrors, your indicators, and your patience.

“Insurance will cover loss to both your car and contents, but you don’t want to add to the stress by having your property stolen or damaged so remember to look after your property.”

Tips for preventing car break-ins from AA Insurance:

1. Lock your car, no matter where it’s parked and keep your keys with you – 15 per cent of survey respondents admitted they don’t always lock their car, such as when they’re at home or at the service station.
2. Don’t display your belongings. If you need to leave items in the car then keep them in the boot.
3. Take valuables (eg wallet, mobile, iPods) with you – don’t leave in the glove box or under a seat.
4. Park in busy, open, well-lit areas. Use an attended, secure parking building if you can.
5. Remove the detachable faceplate of your stereo, GPS cradle and mobile charger.
6. Tell your neighbours if your car has been broken into – thieves often target cars in the same street.
7. Install additional security to your car such as an alarm, or immobiliser.

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About AA Insurance

AA Insurance Limited launched in 1994 and is a joint venture between the New Zealand Automobile Association and Vero New Zealand, which is part of the Suncorp Group. We employ around 580 staff to look after more than 325,000 customers and 600,000 car, home and contents policies.

AA Insurance has been consistently recognised by Reader's Digest Most Trusted Brands (since 2011), NZ Direct Insurer Award (since 2012), Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey (since 2008), and Canstar Blue Most Satisfied Customers (since 2011).

We proudly support youth charity Blue Light, and the Holden Cup and NRL Telstra Premiership referees in New Zealand.

AA Insurance has an A+ (Strong) Insurer Financial Strength Rating given by Standard and Poor's (Australia) Pty Ltd. For further information visit www.aainsurance.co.nz.

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