

Rise in auto thefts in spotlight for Crime Stoppers Month



The rate of auto thefts in Canada has surpassed incidents of break-and-enters, and this month, Crime Stoppers Month, the organization is shining a light on this rising crime and the importance of reporting tips anonymously to the proper authorities.

Crime Stoppers formally kicked off the month-long awareness campaign on Monday afternoon at the York Regional Police's Aurora headquarters.

The theme of Crime Stoppers Month in 2024 is "Be a Crime Stopper, Keep Your Community Safe" and the group, and its community partners, are underscoring not just the rash of auto-related crimes in York Region and beyond, but the impacts such thefts have on the community as a whole.

"Auto thefts have become more prevalent than break-and-enters and international crime rings are often involved in orchestrating auto thefts," said Dave Forster, President of the Canadian Crime Stoppers Association.

Community partners gathered for the January 15 event said Canada has become a "source nation" for stolen vehicle rings operating internationally and trends are going in the wrong direction.

"The auto theft world has changed considerably over the last four to five years in that when I started and [took over the unit] back in 2018, it is almost four times as many stolen cars in the unit in that period of time," said Detective Sergeant Pat Smyth of the York Regional Police's Auto Cargo Unit.

Smyth said these rising statistics have resulted in greater collaboration and cooperation between the YRP and its partner agencies, including Crime Stoppers and Equite Association, which was founded in 2021 to tackle insurance fraud and crime.

Bryan Gast, Vice President of Investigative Services for Equite, says they use "advanced analytics, intelligence best practices and coordinated investigations" to look into personal and commercial insurance frauds and crimes, as well as those related to auto and property.

"It is estimated that insurance crime costs Canada between \$4 billion and \$5 billion a year, and approximately \$1.2 billion of that is through auto theft alone," he said. "This at a time when consumer affordability and inflation are seriously impacting all Canadians. It is also estimated that approximately \$130 from every insurance policy goes towards paying for the increase in auto theft.

"Beyond the financial impact it also seriously impacts [people's] sense of safety. Canadians are feeling vulnerable. The majority are

worried about how this alarming increase in auto theft will impact the crime wave in their communities and they are especially concerned for their personal safety and the safety of their families.?

Many instances of auto theft for sale abroad goes through the Port of Montreal, he added.

?Profit margins are high and seen by criminals as the risk of prosecution is low,? he continued. ?As a result, Canada has become a source nation for stolen vehicles, which are frequently trafficked in order to finance and carry out other criminal activities ranging from drug trafficking to international terrorism?. Insurance crimes are not victimless and have resulted in inequalities both financially and socially. It often disproportionately victimizes the most vulnerable communities and funds other serious crimes. Fighting crime in a collaborative effort, we are extremely proud to be partners with Crime Stoppers.?

All pieces of information, even if one considers them insignificant or irrelevant, he added, are extremely important.

?I know firsthand how incredible and effective the Crime Stoppers program is. The benefits of this program to Canadians and residents of York Region are significant and a tremendous step forward. By sharing information related to insurance crime, Canadians are providing an important and valuable public service to protect their communities.?

If you have any tips related to auto thefts or other crimes, you may report them anonymously through Crime Stoppers by calling 1-800-222-TIPS or visiting them online at www.1800222tips.com.

Anonymous information is then passed on to York Regional Police for investigation. If there is enough evidence to arrest and lay charges, investigators will then relay information to Crime Stoppers to determine the reward for a tipster.

Tips that lead to the arrest can be awarded up to \$2,000.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter