

Don't be a victim: A public service announcement for motor vehicle owners

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
January 18 2018 2:27 PM



MADISON COUNTY - Motor vehicle thefts increase during the winter months, and coupled with the nationwide opioid epidemic, this fact has become problematic to many residents over the last few months.

Many of these issues, including recent vehicle thefts from Alton and Wood River, are a result from motorists leaving their vehicles unattended while running. During winter, many people do this for quick trips into gas stations to ensure their vehicle stays heated

in the frigid cold. Unfortunately, such actions make vehicles easy targets for thieves. This exact scenario occurred in the Alton incident at the Casey's General Store on Broadway Wednesday morning.

But, these crimes are not isolated to gas stations, Captain Mike Dixon of the Madison County Sheriff's Office said Thursday afternoon. Many of these thefts occur on private property in nice neighborhoods.

"We had three car thefts in Bethalto around Christmas, because people leave their keys in their cars," Dixon said. "People will look for the nice neighborhoods and see someone warming up nice cars. If you warm up the car in the morning, make sure you have a remote start."

Dixon said potential thieves will also look for keys in the ignition and unlocked doors.

"We have that often," he said. "People should be able to leave stuff free and open in their cars on their property, in a perfect world, but if you leave your key in the car, you're asking for something to happen. You're rolling the dice."

While auto thefts are somewhat common in the Riverbend lately, carjackings, in which people imply violence to force someone from their vehicle, are not. Dixon said his office has handled three of those in Godfrey over the last six months - with only one unsolved. One of the other two incidents resulted in charges, while another suspect was found dead following a car crash. Each suspect was from St. Louis.

Besides auto thefts, Dixon advised people lock their vehicles for theft in general. He said even people who do not leave high-end electronics, cash or guns in their vehicle often overlook what items of importance are in their vehicle.

"A lot of times, people have their extra keys or garage door openers stolen," Dixon said. "People don't think about how important those are, until they have to change the locks and codes to feel secure in their own homes again."

Recently, both Rosewood Heights and Bethalto have had a rash of vehicle burglaries. Dixon said the State of Illinois recently decreased the felony level of the crimes, but they are still felonies.

Simply locking doors of vehicles can prevent a lot of hassle, Dixon said. Many people who believe thieves will bust windows if the doors are locked are mistaken, because police notice these thieves will simply go to the next vehicle if one is locked. Dixon said the noise of the breaking window and possible subsequent car alarm are too much risk for these thieves to take.

Multiple agencies as well as one car theft victim have told Riverbender.com many of the thefts and burglaries are directly related to the ongoing opioid epidemic, which has become a nationwide crisis - with Madison County being no exception.