

# Car Safety Corner



## In-Vehicle Communications Systems Valuable To Consumers, Law Enforcement

(NAPSA)—An estimated 1.3 million Americans had their vehicles stolen last year, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's annual Uniform Crime Report. After years of steady decline in the '90s, victims of motor vehicle thefts lost an estimated \$8.6 billion in 2003.

As police agencies across the country look for new ways to crack down on this nagging problem, consumers are encouraged to take active measures to deter auto theft. The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), a non-profit organization dedicated to fighting insurance fraud and vehicle theft, recommends a multi-layer of protection to deter car thieves. The suggestions include not leaving keys in the car, locking doors, parking in well-lit areas and using visual and audio deterrents, such as steering wheel locks and car alarms.

In-vehicle safety and communication systems are another option for motorists and are becoming more common in new vehicles. General Motors' OnStar system, used by three million subscribers, uses Global Positioning System (GPS) and wireless technologies to respond to about 500 stolen vehicle requests a month. OnStar advisors work closely with police dispatchers, passing along critical information to help guide authorities to the location of a stolen vehicle.

One person who realized the value of owning a vehicle equipped with an in-vehicle safety system was Raiford Brown. When his 2004 Hummer H2 was stolen from the driveway of his home in Tennessee, Brown called the local sheriff's department to report the theft. After filing a police report, the sheriff's department called OnStar to assist in the recovery of the vehicle. OnStar Advisor Lewis Baldwin used the vehicle's embedded GPS system to pinpoint its whereabouts. By then, the car had been driven across the state line into Sharonville, Ohio. Once authorities recovered the vehicle and apprehended the suspect, they learned he was also one of America's most-wanted fugitives.

"Electronic vehicle locating systems can help reduce the amount of the time it takes police to locate a stolen vehicle and apprehend the suspects," said Col. Paul McClellan, superintendent of the Ohio State Highway Patrol. "Our goal is to get the owner's vehicle back before it's been damaged. Citizens can help by taking the best precautions to help deter theft."

For the 2006 model year, three million GM vehicles in North America will be equipped with the OnStar in-vehicle safety and communications system. The number of such vehicles is expected to grow incrementally, up from 1.4 million in 2004 and 2.2 million in the 2005 model years.