

Subject: "NEW" CAR JACKING SCHEMES

The Internet has stories about schemes to get you out of your car after you have placed your keys in the ignition. Apparently people often leave the keys, and even purses, in the car. Then someone jumps in and drives off with everything.

Is this car jacking claim a valid concern?

R.B. Oviedo

AskOviedoPolice ANSWER:

Many different car theft/car jacking schemes are described on the Internet, along with a few "urban myths." Some of the schemes described have taken on an Internet life of their own.

In fact, there are a number of ways criminals use to distract persons they target as victims. Placing something over a window of your parked car or causing a minor rear-end bump traffic accident are just two distractions criminals hope might get you out of your car with the keys still in the ignition.

In truth, the most common technique criminals use to drive away with a free ride from a thoughtless person is to wait for someone to leave keys in a vehicle (often running) in front of a convenience store. Other spots people unthinkingly will leave keys in the ignition include: in their own driveway; at coin-operated vacuums at gas stations, in self-serve car wash bays while washing; and while using ATMs.

In Florida it is against the law to leave your vehicle with the keys in the ignition. Beyond the grief of having your vehicle stolen, such a violation of the law also could result in your insurance coverage being limited or could make you liable should the car thief cause injury to someone else with your vehicle.

However, there are simple ways of avoiding having a criminal drive away with your car, including:

- always take vehicle keys with you in your hand when you exit your vehicle (they make a great weapon, when necessary);
- always be aware of your surroundings (act and look like you have a clue);
- look at people confidently (they realize you might be able to identify them later);
- when nobody else seems close, take a moment to wait for others to walk nearby (criminals do not like witnesses); and
- when a situation feels "wrong" or raises your suspicions follow your instincts. Draw attention by blowing your car horn or setting off your car alarm, seek out help or stay put and call the Police on a cell phone before something can happen.

People who do not look or act like victims generally can avoid becoming victims. It just takes a little forethought and effort