

Hijackings on the increase

Motorists are warned to be especially vigilant following the recent hike in hijackings.



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According to the South African Insurance Crime Bureau, in Gauteng, hijackings have increased by 17.8% in the past year and, in the Western Cape, hijackings have increased by 41%.

Equally concerning, according to Dialdirect Insurance, is the sudden rise in 'blue-light' hijackings - where hijackers, under the guise of police, use blue, flashing lights or other means to stop and then hi-jack motorists.

To prevent becoming another statistic, Head of Dialdirect, Warwick Scott-Rodger recommends the following easy tips to stay safe:

- Stay alert - It's easy to get distracted when you're travelling the same route every day. Make sure you keep your eyes on the road and notice your surroundings.
- If you're travelling to an area you know to be unsafe, keep a spare, cheap phone on you. Load it with some airtime, save a few emergency contacts onto it and turn it off to make the battery last. If your car and valuables are stolen, you will still be able to call for help.
- Mix up your routes. Use your GPS to try different roads home to throw off any criminals casing your home or your car.
- Get an electric gate. Many hijackings and home invasions happen just as you are entering or leaving your home. Having a well-lit driveway and an electric gate (that can switch to a battery during power failures) can help you get in and out safely.

- Leave enough room between your car and the one in front to avoid being boxed in.
- If you think that you are being followed, drive to the nearest police station or another safe, public place. Don't go home.
- At unusual or unexpected roadblocks, keep windows closed and doors locked and ask for the police or traffic officer's identity card.
- If you sense you are in danger, hit the button on your tracking device if you have one.
- When driving home alone, always phone ahead to give a relative, husband or partner your established time of arrival.
- Get to know your neighbours and the cars they drive. This will help to identify any uncommon vehicles in your area.
- Adopt a search pattern radius to scout before approaching your home.
- Adjust your speed when approaching a traffic light so that you do not have to come to a complete stop.

There are also seven golden rules to follow if you are accosted by a hijacker:

- Remain calm.
- Do not argue.
- Do not make sudden gestures
- Avoid eye contact but try to remember what the carjacker looked like by identifying and remembering special features.
- Comply with the hijackers directions (within reason)
- Try and get away from the area as quickly as possible
- Don't be a hero - your life is worth more than your car

As we all know, prevention is better than cure, but in order to prevent a hijacking situation one needs to be equipped with the correct information and knowledge. Remember that the greatest weapon in a hijacker's arsenal is not his gun, but the belief that it won't happen to us. Hijacking is a reality and you need to be prepared for this horrific eventuality," concludes Scott-Rodger.

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