

Southern Pines Police Department
Safety Tips
Thefts From Vehicles – Credit Card Theft

Thefts from parked vehicles continues to be a crime of opportunity that impacts our community. One of the most effective ways to reduce these crimes is to eliminate the “opportunity”. This is a crime that is easily preventable. First, if you are planning to go to a park or other place where you do not need the valuable, leave it at home. Carry your wallet or purse and cell phone with you. Minimize what you must carry to only what is necessary for your activity and leave the rest at home. If you can’t leave them at home or take them with you, place them in the trunk or out of sight, and do so before you arrive at the parking area –thieves often wait and look for someone moving a valuable when they park. Be alert and report any suspicious activity, vehicles or people to 911 immediately. Many cars have trunk release buttons that operate even when the car is off. Check yours. If it does, ask your mechanic to disable it or wire it so it only works when the key is in the ignition. Take a few extra minutes to plan your outing so you reduce the chance of falling prey to this common crime. Then, **LOCK YOUR CAR!** This is an easy step to prevent most incidents.

Some common problem areas include shopping plazas and malls, movie theatres, health and fitness facilities and almost any remote parking areas. Even neighborhood streets have been targeted, typically during nighttime hours. Remember to lock your vehicle when you leave it unattended in any public place. Locking your vehicle in your own driveway has been shown to prevent some of these crimes as well.

The Southern Pines Police Department reminds motorists to remove all valuable property from their vehicle and keep it locked when parked in a public place. Your car is not a safe place to leave your valuables! Take prevention seriously and put some effort into reducing the threat to your valuables.

Credit Card Theft

Typically, thieves that steal credit or debit cards attempt to use the card within the first hour after the theft. It is unlikely that stores will be able to determine if the card is stolen within this time frame because the victim usually does not know of or has not reported the theft. If you determine that your checks, credit or debit cards have been lost or stolen, call the issuing bank or organization as soon as possible to advise them of the loss. Have them freeze the account and/or cancel the credit card immediately and ask about their policy on unauthorized transactions. Keep a record of the account numbers, as well as the phone number for the organization, in a safe place to help you make proper contact. Most financial institutions limit the cardholder’s liability if the check or card has been reported lost in a timely manner. Also, call 911 to report the incident to the local law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction where the theft occurred. If the card was used, that is an additional crime that should be reported as well. Ask for the name of the investigating officer and a phone number to re-contact him or her. In many cases, financial institutions will contact the victim days or weeks later to advise that the card has been used at a particular establishment. If so, report this new information to the officer. It will help further the investigation and, hopefully, result in the identification of the suspect. A suspect arrested for theft of a credit or debit card can be charged with a crime; if the suspect uses the card to fraudulently purchase goods or services, he or she can also be charged with additional crimes. Of course, it is best to protect your financial items from the potential of theft. Keep them in a safe place at home and carry them only when you expect to use them. Always lock your car and don’t leave wallets, purses, etc. in plain view. If your credit, debit cards or other identifying documents are stolen, review the information on Identity Theft for additional steps you should take to protect your identity.

For more information or a presentation on this topic, contact the Community Services Coordinator at (910) 692-2732.