

WA AUTO THEFT PREVENTION AUTHORITY

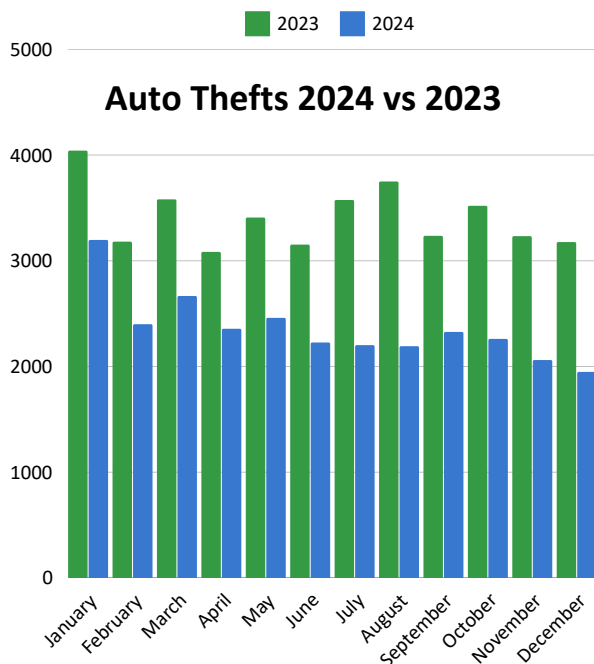
2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Background – The Washington Auto Theft Prevention Authority (WATPA) was established when the Elizabeth Novak – Washington Auto Theft Prevention Act was signed into law and became effective July 1, 2007.

Washington continues to rank #5 nationally in auto theft volume – For the first time since 2020, Washington experienced a decline in auto thefts. Auto thefts were down 31% when compared to 2023. Washington still ranks #7 nationwide in auto thefts per capita and #5 for total volume of auto thefts (through Q3 2024, NICB Trend Analysis Report). Auto thefts per capita are arguably the most meaningful statistic metric when comparing where Washington ranks on the national stage, because it measures thefts to population which creates a clearer picture of opportunity. The good news is that there were 12,640 fewer victims of auto theft in 2024 (Source WSP WACIC year-end report).

The reduction can be attributed to several factors: the hard work of vehicle crime investigators, aggressive prosecution, juvenile incarceration for violent crimes, change in pursuit law, technology upgrades, to include Automated License Plate Readers, and public outreach to assist with education to protect vehicles from theft.



Ranking	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1	DC 563	CO 661	CO 731	DC 1150	DC 622
2	CO 502	DC 651	DC 700	CO 584	CA 359
3	CA 475	CA 511	WA 603	NV 573	NM 48
4	MO 454	NM 476	OR 540	WA 555	CO 330
5	NM 426	OR 471	NM 540	CA 535	NV 303
6	OR 385	WA 462	CA 520	NM 490	MS 295
7	OK 371	MO 428	MS 482	MS 442	WA 292
8	WA 368	NV 427	NV 480	MD 428	MD 268
9	NV 366	OK 359	TX 350	OR 395	TX 246
10	KS 325	TX 320	TN 337	TX 383	TN 217

Source: NICB Trend Report *2024 data is through end of Q3

The following are anecdotes from many of our auto theft grant recipients that received WATPA funding in 2024. These events are a very small snapshot of the good work supported by WATPA resources in 2024.

Puget Sound Auto Theft Task Force (PSATT) – PSATT is funded with six detectives and a sergeant. The sixth detective was not filled in the second half of 2024.

PSATT was by far the most active task force in the state with five detectives assigned in 2024. Along with a robust public outreach and social media strategy, PSATT was responsible for:

364 recoveries totaling \$7,331,123 with 90 arrests resulting in 211 charges. In addition, 12 firearms were recovered.

Detectives conducted several proactive vehicle crimes emphasis patrols utilizing detectives and air support when available. These emphasis patrols proved effective with the apprehension of 36 suspects and the recovery of 41 stolen vehicles.

Detectives worked with the Port of Tacoma to assist with new vehicles being stolen from their staging lots. PSATT identified suspects and assisted the Port of Tacoma with hardening their staging lots to reduce instances of theft.

PSATT was able to reimburse four auto theft victims for the cost of their tow bills when their vehicles were recovered. The victims were ones who could least afford it, relying on their vehicles for work and not being able to afford insurance to cover towing or theft.

Detectives shut down a problem property in Puyallup that was responsible for up to 20 recovered stolen vehicles. The suspects (Samoan gang members) were squatting in a relative's condo. Detectives worked with Puyallup's Crime Suppression Unit and Code Enforcement to eventually force the suspects off the property. Several charges were filed related to the stolen vehicles.

Clark County Prosecutor's Office – This office is funded with two prosecutors who are specifically assigned to prosecute vehicle crime cases. These prosecutors filed 443 cases resulting in 64 suspects being sentenced to prison, 102 suspects being sentenced to jail and three receiving alternative sentences. One case of note:

A suspect was returned to Clark County from a Florida prison for prosecution of 28 charges across seven separate cause numbers. Several of these cases involved vehicle-related crimes, and a negotiated and relatively expedited global resolution resulted in four vehicle crime convictions and a 43-month sentence. This was admittedly a generous resolution as pertained to the sentencing outcome, but a good one considering the length of time these cases languished while the defendant was on warrant status. Most notably, the sentencing judge made an impactful statement on the record that stolen car cases are deeply disruptive to individuals and families in our community, that they impede an innocent victims' ability to work and thrive, and that the citizens of Clark County have been clear that they are fed up with these types of crimes. This is a judge who had not so long ago made a statement on the record to the effect that car cases are "just property crimes" – so it was encouraging to hear that the collective efforts in prosecuting these cases are shifting the mindset and the tone from the bench.

Snohomish County Auto Theft Task Force (SNOCAT) – SNOCAT is funded with two detectives and .5 of a sergeant’s position. SNOCAT detectives initiated 101 auto theft cases and arrested 23 suspects.

Detectives developed roll call training for the Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office. Detectives taught that training to new hires who are waiting to go to the academy and some that are waiting to start their field training.

Detectives were called on to assist with the investigation of 4 vehicles stolen from an Auction Site. It was determined that the suspect was a customer who recently purchased 18 vehicles. It was discovered that the 18 vehicles were fraudulently purchased thus also stolen. Eight vehicles were recovered within the first 48 hours while six others were recovered shortly after.

SNOCAT conducted three Stolen Vehicle interdiction operations utilizing the WAPTA funded ALPR. The ALPR was responsible for two recoveries: a stolen vehicle and a stolen license plate.

Detectives recovered a skid steer, excavator, and utility trailer in the month of July. The victim paid \$120,000 in cash for the items. It was determined the crime took place in another jurisdiction, so detectives worked closely with that jurisdiction to complete the investigation. A suspect was identified, and an arrest was made in King County. Detectives have kept in touch with the victim to help them try to recover their \$120,000.

Spokane Auto Theft Task Force – This Task Force is funded with a detective from the Spokane Police Department and a detective from the Stevens County Sheriff’s Office. Stevens County Sheriff’s Office made 30 arrests and referred 33 cases for prosecution. The Spokane Police Department made 28 arrests and referred 28 cases for prosecution. Two investigations of note:

In February, detectives spent a week with the US Marshal Violent Offender Fugitive Task Force to locate and arrest a suspect for his involvement in burglaries and auto theft in Spokane and Stevens Counties. After the suspect was located and apprehended, a search warrant was served in Stevens County in which a stolen Bobcat Skid Steer and a bucket truck were recovered. One person was booked for charges of possession of stolen property and possession of a stolen motor vehicle. An undercover operation was conducted where a detective posed as a buyer for a stolen \$40,000 generator that was listed for sale on Facebook Marketplace. The generator was recovered and three people were booked for possession and trafficking stolen property. This arrest led to the arrest of a fourth person who had a stolen enclosed trailer and stolen property from a burglary in Stevens County.

In November, detectives located an unoccupied stolen Mazda MPV. Through their investigation, they were able to identify a suspect after finding a McDonald’s receipt in the vehicle, from earlier that morning. Detectives went to that McDonalds location and found the associated surveillance video from the purchase. Shortly after, detectives located the suspect and were able to recover thousands of dollars’ worth of military-issued equipment. This equipment had been stolen in a vehicle prowling from an active-duty Airman the night prior. Detectives were able to return the stolen items to the victim.

Supplemental Funding/Technology

WATPA received a supplement during the 2024 legislative session. This allowed WATPA to open an equipment and technology grant process to combine with the prosecution, investigation and public outreach components funded with an earlier WATPA grant. WATPA anticipates that this will assist with reducing instances of vehicle crime across the state. In addition, WATPA, in conjunction with the NW Chapter of the Western States Auto Theft Investigators will be holding a Vehicle Crimes Conference in March of 2025. Several excellent instructors from across the United States will share what they have used to combat vehicle crimes. It is anticipated that 200 law enforcement professionals will attend this training.

Thank you to our State Legislators who made this happen.

WATPA issued approximately \$2.7 in grants to 45 agencies between April – July 2024. Most of the grant money went towards Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) technology along with Drone technology and technology aimed at reducing pursuits. Due to the amount of ALPR technology funded, there was a backlog for installing the equipment, so several agencies do not have their programs up and running at the time of this report. Here are a few highlights from those who had implemented WATPA funded equipment:

- The Enumclaw Police Department was able to apprehend an auto theft suspect utilizing thermal drone technology after the suspect fled from a stolen vehicle on foot.
- The Lakewood Police Department was able to identify and track five homicide suspects from the scene to Everett utilizing ALPR technology. Four of the five suspects were taken into custody and they may not have been apprehended without the ALPR technology.
- The Skamania County Sheriffs Department utilized ALPR technology to assist them with recovering two missing hunters. The ALPR technology assisted with focusing the investigation and narrowing the search area.
- The Everett Police Department installed 74 ALPR cameras in September. Between September and December the ALPR cameras were responsible for: assisting with the recovery of 57 stolen vehicles, 74 arrests, two missing persons located, 12 instance of narcotics being recovered and four firearms recovered. Of the arrests listed above, the ALPR cameras were instrumental in locating and apprehending a homicide suspect, recovering an occupied stolen vehicle with solen police and fire equipment inside (including a firearm and body armor), the arrest of two separate domestic violence suspects, the identification and arrest of a vehicle prowl suspect within two hours of the crime occurring and an occupied stolen vehicle that contained evidence of a recent series of ATM thefts in the greater Seattle area.

Public Outreach

Safer Cars, Safer Communities – The Kent Police Department (KPD) Targeted the top 10 most frequently stolen vehicles as well as identified hot zones for auto theft in their city. KPD sent out social media notice to alert owners of the frequently stolen vehicles of opportunities to obtain steering wheel locks provided by Hyundai, KIA and WATPA. They also hosted events at Kent Police Department to distribute the wheel locks. In addition, Kent PD visited apartment complexes where instances of motor vehicle theft were high and worked with management to educate their residents and provide steering wheel locks to the residents. Through the first ¾ of the year, vehicle theft was down 36% city wide, hot zone vehicle theft was down 45%.

Washington State Fair Outreach – The Puget Sound Auto Theft Task Force conducted outreach during the weekends at the Washington State Fair interacting with over 75,000 people per weekend. They had several giveaway items with the WATPA logo and answered many questions from the citizens.

WATPA Radio Ads - WATPA teamed up with Bonneville Seattle Communications to run 30 second auto theft Public Service Announcements on Sports Radio 710 (which is broadcast throughout the state) between September and December. The ads are updated regularly and will run until June 30, 2025.

Spokane PD Steering Wheel Locks – The Spokane Police Department utilized social media to distribute 386 steering wheel locks to members of their community, targeting owners of vehicles that are frequently stolen.

Hyundai Corporation Partnership – Both PSATT and SNOCAT worked with the Hyundai Corporation to organize community events to set up remote sites to upload anti-theft software to Hyundai vehicles and pass out anti-theft devices.

Conclusion

While Washington experienced a much-needed decrease in auto theft, there is still work to be done. WATPA will continue to work with all stakeholders to reduce the incidents of auto theft as well as, stolen vehicles being used to perpetuate violent crime.

WATPA is seeking an increase in funding during the 2025-2027 biennial budget process to further address vehicle crime in the State of Washington with some funds being used to assist victims of vehicle crime. WATPA is optimistic that utilizing the existing resources coupled with technology implemented in 2024 will further reduce instances of vehicle crime in Washington.