

# Property crime

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## 1. Introduction

Property damage from vandalism and graffiti costs the community a lot through repair and replacement, inconvenience, loss of services and increased insurance costs. Property loss from burglary and robbery and motor vehicle theft also impose major costs—emotional, physical, psychological and financial.

Property crime is one of the most common crimes experienced by Australians. In April 2002, the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a crime and safety survey to get a picture of the way crime affects the Australian community. In the 12 months prior to the survey, it was estimated that 354,000 households in Australia had at least one break-in to their home, garage or shed. Nationally, this means that around 4.7 per cent of households were likely to be victims, down slightly from 5.0 per cent in 1998, when the last survey was done. The survey reported that 254,400 households (3.4 per cent of all households) found signs of at least one attempted break-in. The survey estimated that about 134,300 households had at least one motor vehicle stolen.

National figures like these hide considerable differences between states and territories. Northern Territory had the highest proportion of households experiencing a break-in (13.5 per cent of all households) followed by Western Australia (6.2 per cent). The lowest rates were in Victoria (3.4 per cent) and the Australian Capital Territory (4.4 per cent). State or territory figures in turn hide considerable differences between suburbs and between rural and regional areas.

But even in high burglary neighbourhoods, most residences have no burglaries while a few suffer burglaries again and again. For property crimes (and personal crimes) a majority of offences are committed by a minority of offenders and a small number of victims experience a disproportionate number of crimes.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the actual figures, many people think property crime is a problem in their area. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002 Crime and Safety Survey, the most commonly perceived crime or public nuisance problem was housebreaking/burglaries/theft from homes, with 44 per cent of people believing this was a problem. Other commonly named problems were dangerous/noisy driving (39 per cent), vandalism/graffiti/damage to property (27 per cent) and car theft (25 per cent).

This module looks at some of the most common crimes experienced by Australians—residential burglary and motor vehicle theft. It also examines offences such as graffiti and vandalism, which affect communities, not just individuals or households. How serious are these crimes? How do they affect us? What can we do about them?

## 2. Burglary and break-ins

Home burglaries and break-ins are among the most common crimes in Australia. They account for over one-fifth of all offences recorded by the police. Australia's burglary rate is also relatively high by international standards, reflecting our relative wealth and the fact that many homes contain items

that are valuable and easy to transport and re-sell—jewellery, videos, cameras, stereos and compact discs. These are the items most commonly stolen in residential burglaries. Easy access to garages and outdoor sheds also makes bicycles, tools and garden equipment popular targets.

Most urban Australians, if they have not been the victims of a burglary, would know someone who has. The odds are that most residents in an urban area will become victims of burglary at least once in their lives. Apart from financial loss and inconvenience, burglary can be devastating emotionally if you lose sentimental possessions, like a wedding ring or a retirement gift or the trophy you won in your final year of school.

Men, and young men in particular, commit most property crime—2002/03 figures from the Victorian Police show that men commit 88 per cent of vehicle theft, 89 per cent of break-and-enters and 53 per cent of shop theft in Victoria.<sup>2</sup> Queensland police data show that a significant proportion of those caught are aged between 15 and 19.

**Theft quiz**

Take two minutes to go through the questions on your own and then spend five minutes or so talking about your responses with the rest of the group.

<b>At home</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you leave your car unlocked:		
- in the garage/carport?		
- in the driveway?		
- parked in the front?		
Do you leave your car/house keys on the kitchen or dining table?		
Is your address identified on your:		
- car keys?		
- house keys?		
If you have keyed window locks at home, are they left unlocked when you are out?		
If you have deadlocks on your entry doors at home, do you frequently leave them unlocked when you go out?		
If you have a home alarm, do you often forget to set it before you go out?		
<b>At work</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you leave your keys on your desk or in your purse on your desk?		
Do you often forget to lock your car while you are at work?		
<b>Shopping</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you ever leave parcels on the back seat of your car while you go back to buy more items?		
Do you leave your car unlocked while you are in the shops?		
<b>General</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
If your car has an alarm, do you forget to set it or choose not to set it?		
Do you keep your driver's licence in the glove box?		
Are your car registration papers in the glove box?		
Do you leave your mobile telephone in the car?		
Have you left valuables in your car within view of passers-by?		
Do you leave your car unlocked when:		

- paying for petrol?		
- going quickly into the shops?		

What was the response? Is your group generally careful and security conscious? If most of your answers were yes, you could reduce your risk of being burgled. Have a look at the tips at the end of the module or ask your insurance company for information on simple steps that you could take.

### **Burglary: What's the risk?**

*Unlawful entry with intent* is the name the police give to the group of offences that includes burglaries, break-and-enter and stealing. It includes situations where property is intentionally stolen and situations where the unlawful entry does not result in the taking of property.

Nationally, the number of victims of unlawful entry with intent has decreased from 2002 to 2003. Western Australia recorded the highest victimisation rate in 2003 with 2,900 victims per 100,000. This rate was more than double that of Victoria, which recorded the lowest rate (1,233 victims per 100,000). All states and territories recorded decreased rates of unlawful entry with intent victimisation from 2002 to 2003.<sup>3</sup>

Some households have a greater risk of break-in than others:

- one-parent households and single-person households
- households with large amounts of motor vehicle traffic in the street
- households next to laneways and bicycle paths
- households in areas where 10 per cent or more of the population are unemployed
- households in areas where 9 per cent or more of the population are males aged 15–24 years
- households in cities or towns with a population of 8,000 or more.<sup>4</sup>

The rate at which break-ins are solved is quite low. Nationally, in 2003 fewer than one in 10 investigations (8 per cent) were finalised within 30 days of the police knowing about the incident.<sup>5</sup>

### **The impact: Material loss? Frustration? Or violation?**

For most people, burglary is distressing. For some, it means the loss of precious possessions or items with sentimental value that can't be replaced. For others, it means the loss that comes from being uninsured or underinsured. Or the inconvenience and time involved with making a claim and waiting while goods are replaced.

But many victims of burglary say that the biggest impact is the sense of violation—of someone invading their personal, private space. It has nothing to do with material or financial loss, and it's not the same thing as feeling insecure or vulnerable.

The overall cost of burglary continues to rise even in places where the number of burglaries is fairly stable. Insurance organisations pay out millions of dollars on burglary claims and this in turn increases in the cost of every home and contents policy. In 1997–98, the insurance organisation NRMA paid out \$46.3 million on burglary claims; this increases the cost of every home contents policy by more than \$80.

### **Discussion starters**

- Has anyone in the group ever been burgled? If yes, you might share your experience with the group. What was the most difficult thing to deal

with? What have you done since to reduce the risk of burglary in your community?

- While the figures vary in different parts of Australia, overall, burglary has increased in recent years. What do you think might explain this? What steps might help address the factors underlying burglary rates?

## Reducing burglary

### How big a priority?

All governments and communities face competing demands on their money and time. How might you decide if addressing burglary is a significant priority in your area? You could start by asking the following questions:

- Are our burglary rates higher than in other areas like ours?
- Is burglary in our area increasing faster than other crimes, or faster than in other similar areas?
- Is burglary costing victims a lot, and do they belong to particularly vulnerable groups?
- Is burglary causing significant public anxiety and concern?
- Is there something we can do about it?

### Reducing the opportunity for break-ins

For most people, it makes sense to invest in basic home security. But alarm systems can be costly and not everyone needs them or can afford them. Police and insurance companies say that many break-ins could be prevented with a little common sense. Often the most important thing to do is use the security you have. In many burglaries, windows or doors were left unlocked, keys left under a pot plant, or notes left saying when someone will be back.

According to a former burglar, if you have valuable things you really don't want to lose, the best investments are window bars, deadlocks and, if something is really valuable to you, a safe. 'Your average thief isn't carrying safe-cutting tools with him. Most blokes see a safe, throw up their hands and go next door.'<sup>6</sup>

Upgrading security may make some people feel safer, but it can make others feel isolated and increase their sense of fear. Focusing on physical home security won't help you feel part of the neighbourhood or create a sense of cohesion and community in your local area.

These are some of the factors that are important to both reducing crime in an area and reducing fear of crime. Getting to know neighbours will create a more familiar community. A vigilant neighbour is probably the best form of security. This can be difficult in areas where all the adults in a household work outside the home. But in many neighbourhoods you'll find a mix of parents at home caring for children, people who work from home or students and older or unemployed people who spend more time at home.

### Case study: Reducing repeat home burglaries

This National Crime Prevention partnership project will be located in hot-spot areas of Queensland and South Australia and focus on preventing repeat victimisation. This strategy has proven successful overseas in reducing the burglary rate, not just moving the crime to other areas. A variety of strategies will be used, such as making properties more difficult to break into, increasing the likelihood of detection and reducing the rewards. Police and community groups are involved, with an emphasis on police delivery in Queensland and

community-based delivery in South Australia.

The focus on repeat victimisation follows the success of similar strategies overseas. One example that is often referred to is the Kirkholt housing estate in the United Kingdom.

The additional resources at the end of the module include a case study on this program. It succeeded in preventing re-victimisation and reducing burglary rates by 75 per cent for the whole estate. There was no evidence that crime simply moved to other areas.

For further information see also: *Lightning strikes twice: Preventing repeat home burglary*. Report prepared for the Australian Government's National Crime Prevention project by the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission, 2001

### **Communities working together**

Getting involved in local activities or organisations can help build long-term solutions to some of the problems of social isolation and alienation that contribute to crime. Programs like Neighbourhood Watch, Safety House, resident action groups and youth-led activities can all help prevent crime and are found in most parts of Australia. If nothing is happening in your area, you can always think about starting a group. There are lots of examples to look at and people to help.

Cooperation between schools, shopping centres, parents, citizens, local service providers and police has proved effective in Australia and overseas in preventing crime and strengthening communities. Some local governments have established area committees, crime prevention or community safety groups that welcome community input. Your local police may also have a community consultative committee or community safety team that you might be able to get involved with. Talking and working with others can also give you information about what problems there are in your community and what could be done to address them.

#### **Neighbourhood Watch**

Many people will have come across Neighbourhood Watch. It involves the local community and police working together to build a safer community and prevent crime. Neighbourhood Watch, Rural Watch, Business Watch, Taxi Watch, School Watch and Hospital Watch can be found in every state and territory. In 2001, for example, Neighbourhood Watch represents about 800,000 South Australians and involves about 27,000 volunteers, which is about 8.4 per cent of the state population involved in various programs.<sup>7</sup>

In 1999, Launceston groups ran a pilot project with Tasmania's Crime Prevention and Community Safety Council called 'Project Samaritan' to reduce the incidence of repeat burglary victimisation. Training was provided to Neighbourhood Watch volunteers and police, to help them and to assist victims of property offences. The pilot was successful and the victim support program now runs statewide. Police attending residential burglaries will advise on household security and inform victims if they are at risk of being burgled again. At the request of the victim, an accredited Neighbourhood Watch security officer will visit the victim and provide further security advice and assistance.

The idea behind Neighbourhood Watch is that if you know an area well you are likely to recognise strangers or unusual behaviour. The organisation's objectives are to:

- minimise the incidence of preventable crime

- increase reporting of crime and suspicious activity
- improve personal and household security through education
- encourage the community to identify their property by engraving their licence number or another unique number and initials of their state or territory on valuable items and/or photographing items and keeping a list of them in a safe place (Your local Neighbourhood Watch Area Coordinator or police station should have electric engravers you can use to mark your property and stickers that tell people that items in your house are marked.)
- actively assist in the promotion of mutual cooperation and caring among neighbours and other organisations
- liaise with other Neighbourhood Watch areas and community groups and services to promote these aims.

While community-based programs like Neighbourhood Watch can make a big contribution to crime prevention, they do require commitment and involvement. Without it, they fail.

If there isn't a group in your suburb and you would like to get involved in starting the program in your area, contact the community relations personnel at your local police station. All Area Coordinators and Zone Leaders must have a criminal record check.

### **Safety House**

Safety House is a community-based program designed to enable children and other people to identify a safe place to go if they need it. The Safety House logo (a smiling house on a yellow background) represents a house or business where someone in need of help can find assistance and comfort. The Safety Householder's role is to phone police or another appropriate person such as a parent or crisis service, and comfort the victim. Contact the Safety House Association in your state or territory if you want to become a Safety Householder or join a committee in your area. A Safety Householder is required to have a police criminal check.

### **Crime Stoppers**

Crime Stoppers is a telephone hotline to provide information about criminal activity. A caller can remain anonymous and calls are not recorded or traced. Callers can ring a freecall number 1800 333 000. If an arrest follows a call, a reward of up to \$1,000 may be paid. Reward money comes from a fund controlled and administered by a Community Board and provided by contributions from the community. The Australian Government is a major sponsor.

Crime Stoppers operates in each state and territory. It enables the community to contribute directly to catching offenders and solving crimes, and helps to put people off committing a crime and to raise awareness of safety and security.

### **Discussion starters**

- Is burglary a problem in your neighbourhood? How do you know?
- Brainstorm some ideas on how burglary might be reduced in your local community, noting down key points. When everyone has finished, look at the suggestions and mark what you can do as individuals and what requires cooperation with others. Where possible, identify whom you would need to work with. Are there people in the group who are willing to approach relevant individuals or organisations?
- If you are interested in looking at what other communities have done, the additional resources at the end of the module include case studies of successful efforts to reduce burglary. You might break into smaller groups and explore whether there are any approaches that could be useful

in your community.

### 3. Motor vehicle theft

Among major Western countries, Australia's rate of car theft is second only to that in the United Kingdom. Some people suggest that lack of coordination between the states and territories is part of the problem.<sup>8</sup>

#### Car theft: some facts

- In total, 98,813 vehicles were stolen in Australia in 2003—a decrease from 2002 (113,460). During 2003, the largest percentage increase in theft of motor vehicles was recorded in the ACT (24 per cent). Victoria had the largest percentage decrease in motor vehicle theft from 2002 to 2003 (18 per cent)<sup>9</sup>
- In 2003, the most frequent place where motor vehicle theft occurred was the street/footpath (36 per cent), followed by an outbuilding/residential land (26 per cent).<sup>10</sup>
- Older cars are more likely to be stolen; newer cars are more likely to be broken into.
- Estimates suggest motor vehicle theft costs insurers \$590 million (which is passed on to consumers) and costs the community more than \$885 million dollars a year.<sup>11</sup>
- Young males aged 14–20 make up the majority of offenders who are caught. A large number of the offences are committed by a small number of young people.

**Car theft in early adolescence appears to be a strong indication that offending behaviour is likely to increase through adolescence.**<sup>12</sup>

#### Discussion starters

- Has anyone in the group ever had a car stolen? If yes, you might share your experience. What were the circumstances? Could you have prevented it? Did you get the car back? Do you know who was responsible?
- Is car theft a problem in your suburb? How do you know? Is it mostly in particular areas?
- Brainstorm some ideas on how car theft might be reduced in your local community, noting down key points. When everyone has finished, look at the suggestions and mark what you can do as individuals and what requires cooperation with others. Where possible, identify whom you would need to work with. Is anyone willing to approach relevant individuals or organisations about your group's ideas?
- In the Additional Resources section at the end of the module you will find some tips on securing your car. If you are interested in looking at examples of what has been tried in other communities, you will also find case studies outlining successful efforts to reduce motor vehicle theft. You might like to break into smaller groups to explore whether any of the approaches could be useful in your community.
- NRMA Crime Safe has produced a booklet of practical suggestions, called How to Secure Your Car. It is available from all NRMA branches, by calling 132 132 or from the website:  
[http://www.nrma.com.au/Page/Public?PageId=abt\\_com\\_htsync\\_index](http://www.nrma.com.au/Page/Public?PageId=abt_com_htsync_index).

#### Reducing car theft

The National Motor Vehicle Theft Task Force (NMVTTF) was established to address concerns

about national coordination. It included representatives from the motor vehicle and insurance industries, police, motor vehicle registration offices and national industry bodies. Since its inception the NMVTTF has enhanced the national strategy recognising that effective prevention needs to address opportunistic theft (including joyriding), which makes up an estimated 75 per cent of all car theft, and professional theft (including parts stripping), an estimated 25 per cent of offences.<sup>13</sup> The main elements of the strategy are outlined below.

#### **A national strategy**

1. The lack of a system for national coordination of motor vehicle registration information makes the theft and resale of cars easier. What is needed is rapid national exchange of stolen vehicle information, improved vehicle inspection rules and proper identity checks on those who register vehicles.
2. The spare parts sector wants component labelling to deter theft and help detect stolen vehicle components, but car manufacturers are not convinced it would make enough difference to justify the costs involved. The task force called for more research, noting that labelling may prove viable once other strategies are in place.
3. Improving vehicle identification methods and technology will make it more difficult to change the identity of vehicles. Compliance plates—which have to be fitted to all Australian vehicles to show they have met required standards when first registered—can help identify a vehicle. While changing these makes it easier to re-birth cars, it is not an offence to remove or tamper with compliance plates in most Australian states.
4. Improved vehicle security makes theft harder. The key issue is how to do this at reasonable cost. The taskforce agreed on the need for immobilisers in all new cars.
5. If other initiatives are to work, consistent registration procedures and standards in all states and territories are critical.
6. Proposals 1–5 aim to deter organised offenders. But the majority of car theft is opportunistic and the motivation is to use the car, not sell it. Improved vehicle security can make cars harder to steal but this may mean that offenders focus on more vulnerable cars rather than reduce theft. Broader crime prevention measures such as employment and leisure options for young people are needed to reduce opportunistic theft.

Since the inception of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council in 1999 some positive changes in combating motor vehicle theft have taken place.

#### **In 1999:**

- 132,000 vehicles were stolen.
- The collation of national vehicle theft data was limited to the high level analysis published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics 6–8 months after the end of each calendar year.
- Only New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria were exchanging vehicle registration data in real time.
- Only NSW and South Australia were recording the identity of wrecked and written-off vehicles.
- Vehicle theft was assigned a low priority by police services nationally.
- Deficiencies in the way vehicle manufacturers applied vehicle identifiers made re-identifying stolen vehicles relatively simple.

#### **By the end of 2002:**

- The number of vehicles stolen for the year had fallen to 109,000—representing the lowest rate of theft in more than 20 years.
- A comprehensive suite of integrated data from more than 40 sources is published quarterly, and stakeholders are able to customise their own information needs on-line.
- Only the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania are not exchanging registration data.
- Only Western Australia is yet to implement a written-off vehicle register.
- Vehicle theft is a priority issue to most police services and the newly formed Australian Crime Commission.<sup>13a</sup>

### How serious are we about tackling car theft?

The National Motor Vehicle Theft Task Force and later the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council have found that immobilisers offer the best protection against motor vehicle theft. A small percentage of vehicles that are fitted with immobilisers are stolen. Research indicates that immobilisers are fitted to 45% of all vehicles in Australia, but only 7% of stolen vehicles. In most of these cases the thief obtained access to the original key because it was left in or near the vehicle, or by theft from a home or workplace.<sup>14</sup> Since 1 July 1999 in Western Australia, it is compulsory to fit an approved immobiliser on the purchase of a vehicle. What's the problem? Is it that manufacturers and dealers don't care or that consumers don't care? Since 2001, engine immobilisers that comply with European requirements are required to be fitted to all new cars sold in Australia.

### Discussion starters

- The group might like to get hold of *Bowled Over*, a 12-minute video put out by NRMA CrimeSafe. It provides a light-hearted look at car security and how you can protect your car from theft and break-in. It covers some of the car security devices available and advises how to make your car less attractive to thieves. You can borrow the video, free of charge, from any NRMA branch. If you don't have one near you, call 132 132 for more information on how you might get a copy.
- If your car has no anti-theft/personal security equipment, you may be able to install it. Ask a local car dealer, service station or automotive engineer and check that any security system you consider meets Australian standards.

### Young offenders

Most car theft offenders who are caught are young men aged 14–20. They usually steal a car to use it rather than for financial gain. Reducing this kind of theft involves addressing anti-social behaviour and diverting young people towards a more positive lifestyle.

... the major challenges in preventing car theft in young people are mostly the same as for preventing crime in young people generally ... an absence of a cohesive, nationally coordinated strategy has ensured that juvenile crime prevention (and all other crime prevention programs for that matter) remain short-term, reliant on grant funding, and often ineffective ...

Philip Hill, 'Preventing Car Theft in Australia: "Golden Opportunity" for Partnerships', Australian Institute of Criminology: Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice, No. 86, April 1998.

### Discussion starters

- Some of the factors driving young offenders include thrill seeking,

boredom, limited access to transport and a desire for peer recognition. Do you think there are enough opportunities and challenges for young people in your area? Are young people encouraged to be active participants in your community? Are they valued enough? Do you think young people would agree? If there aren't any young people in the group, how could you get their views?

- Do young people have access to public transport? If not, what options might be considered to enable them to move around?
- An estimated 75 per cent of cars are stolen to be used rather than to make money. Do you think we give enough emphasis to preventing this kind of theft? What ideas do you have for reducing non-professional car theft?

#### **4. Insurance fraud**

According to the NRMA (one of Australia's largest insurers), insurance fraud—involving petty criminals and organised gangs—adds about \$70 to the cost of every insurance policy.

The Insurance Council of Australia estimates that insurance fraud costs insurers and policy holders an estimated \$540 million. This figure excludes workers' compensation fraud. It is not clear how many claims include some element of fraud but estimates are at 10 per cent of the money paid out by insurers.<sup>14</sup>

Industry efforts to tackle fraud include sharing information, new technology, staff training, ways for the public to report possible fraud, and school and community education. But what can the rest of us do to help reduce our insurance costs? While there are people who are prepared to expose wrongdoing, many Australians are reluctant to report someone trying to gain a benefit to which they are not entitled. A study by the Insurance Council of Australia in 1994 found that one in four people knew of someone who had lodged a fraudulent claim.<sup>15</sup>

A recent national study conducted by the Insurance Council of Australia and reported by NRMA revealed about one quarter of consumers and businesses know someone who has committed insurance fraud and the vast majority of Australians (98 per cent) believe insurance fraud should be punished.

[http://www.nrma.com.au/pub/nrma/about\\_us/media\\_releases/20030814a.shtml](http://www.nrma.com.au/pub/nrma/about_us/media_releases/20030814a.shtml)

##### **Discussion starters**

- What do you think should be done to reduce insurance fraud? Is there anything you can do as an individual?
- Many of us contribute to the problem by using a legitimate insurance claim as an opportunity to get some other small things fixed too. We also contribute to the problem when we buy cheap goods at the pub or through a friend without asking where they came from. If the goods turn out to be stolen, we have a serious problem in trying to claim insurance and we may be in trouble with the police as well. How do you think this kind of fraud should be tackled?

#### **5. Vandalism including graffiti**

**Vandalism: Is it a design problem?**

A lot of vandalism, maybe as much as three-quarters, is opportunistic.

Examples of opportunistic vandalism are damage to flimsy doors without door stops in heavily used entrances, short cuts across lawns, holes in fences to create short cuts, damage to the backs of park benches caused by people straddling them, doors broken open by curious children, and bikes leaned against shop windows because there is nowhere else to put them. In most of these cases, the problem could have been... [avoided] by better design and planning.

Susan Geason, Paul R. Wilson, *Preventing Graffiti & Vandalism*, Crime Prevention Series, Australian Institute of Criminology, 1990, pp. 1–2.

Sometimes the organisations or people building public housing or facilities cut costs by using lower quality materials or a design that doesn't suit a particular climate or area or how the facility will be used. For example, for many years remote Aboriginal communities often weren't consulted about their needs and housing often wasn't designed to take account of family and community structures, climate or the difficulty of organising maintenance. So buildings often deteriorated quickly.

But urban design can also encourage stronger communities where residents take responsibility for their area and in so doing increase the risk to offenders and the effort required to commit crimes. The design of public spaces and residential areas can affect the rate of crimes such as burglary, theft, vandalism and car theft.

Estimates suggest that only a small amount of vandalism is planned. Examples include the malicious damage of trains, soccer hooliganism and damage caused by street gangs. The motivation is often complex but a big part of it is alienation, frustration, boredom or anger at a system that appears to treat some people well and marginalise others.<sup>16</sup>

Doing something about graffiti and vandalism may produce other benefits. When an area is well-kept and pleasant to be in, it attracts more people and this, in itself, may help to reduce crimes such as assault or theft.

#### **Discussion starters**

- Carving your initials in a school desk or a tree in a public park or writing on a toilet door is vandalism. Accidentally damaging public property but not telling anyone is vandalism too. If you feel comfortable, you could talk about situations where you might have been involved in vandalism. What were the circumstances? What were the implications? How should this kind of vandalism be addressed?
- Is vandalism an issue in your local area? If yes, what factors do you think contribute to the problem? Is it concentrated in particular areas? If the answer is no, what factors have contributed to this outcome?
- If vandalism is an issue in your community, does it seem to be opportunistic or planned? How do you think it might be prevented? You might brainstorm some ideas and note down the key points. Then look at the list and identify where individuals or the group could contribute. What would it take for you to act on these ideas?
- How would you define graffiti? What factors would make you think it was vandalism? Which factors would make you think it was art or social comment?
- Does graffiti concern you? If yes, which aspects? Is it an issue in your area? If no, why do you think this is so? If yes, what do you think are some of the contributing factors?
- Why do you think people get involved in painting graffiti?

## What's the problem?

Vandalism can cost some communities a lot—not just in money spent to fix or prevent it but also in increasing fear of crime, impacting on local services, increasing the risk of stigmatising already underprivileged communities and lowering the quality of life. Some people see graffiti as just another form of vandalism. For others, graffiti is self-expression, art, political comment or social action. Here are a couple of perspectives:

A survey of 11 of WA's 144 councils reveals a clean-up bill of nearly \$1.7 million and a range of initiatives to deal with the problem, including hotlines and mobile graffiti removal teams.

There were 9416 graffiti offences reported to police last financial year and 7658 offences so far this year.

The number of recorded offences has dropped from a peak of more than 14,000 in 2001–02, but it is thought many people have given up reporting graffiti due to the unlikelihood the culprits will be caught.

Graffiti is the least likely of any type of offence to be solved, with a police clearance rate of 7.8 per cent.

Western Australian Local Government Association president Clive Robartson said a graffiti working group of councils and state government agencies had met recently for the first time, but more was needed.

Police Sgt Mike Gough said graffiti was a silent crime, often committed in the middle of the night without witnesses.

But Sgt Gough said failure to report incidents of graffiti only exacerbated the difficulty of catching offenders.

Reporting the crime allowed police to identify and monitor individual graffiti tags. Offenders would be charged.

Police Minister Michelle Roberts said councils had developed successful anti-graffiti programs and the government was committed to a partnership approach.

A central contact point to report the crime was being considered.

'The state government's approach is to partner with local communities and this is working, with reports of graffiti well down,' she said.

'The state government also has a successful program with its agencies in removing graffiti within a 24-hour period.'

*The West Australian* 24 May 2004

You can rid your area of graffiti! Graffiti and litter have been identified as the major causes of the fear of crime among suburban residents, especially the elderly. Neighbourhood Watch areas can play an important role in the removal of graffiti and eventually stop it. ... Ridding your area of graffiti will not only make your streets more pleasant to live in and walk through, the residents will feel safer and they will appreciate your efforts. The task may not be easy or achievable in only a few weeks ... BUT IT CAN BE DONE!

From OzNoGraffiti, an Anti-Graffiti Information Page, <http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/graffiti.htm>.

### Discussion starters

- Is graffiti always vandalism?
- How big an issue is vandalism in your community? Does it affect how an area feels—and how you feel about it?
- What about graffiti? Do you think it's a significant issue? Why/why not?

### Graffiti: Who does it and why?

Graffiti has a significant financial and social impact on the community, through both the cost of graffiti clean-ups and increased premiums and government taxes. Most studies into graffiti have either used content analysis or experimental design to investigate reasons behind the behaviour, but do not provide a full description and understanding of adolescents who graffiti. Very few studies to date have used a community sample to examine the prevalence of graffiti behaviour in adolescents and its behavioural and psychological covariates. Many current approaches to the prevention of graffiti focus on quick removal of the graffiti, reporting, surveillance, reinstitution of offenders, and implementation of crime prevention through environmental design. However, there are a number of underlying characteristics of adolescents who graffiti, which have not yet been identified or explored for association with other individual factors, and have not been incorporated into the design of preventative approaches. The aim of this study was to examine the covariates of graffiti behaviour in adolescents and to determine the independence of graffiti behaviour from antisocial behaviour. Two thousand, six hundred and three adolescents from a community sample completed the Youth Assessment Checklist, which measured a number of family (eg. family functioning), psychological (eg. depression), and behavioural variables (eg. risk taking), as well as suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Results suggest that there are a number of underlying problems experienced by adolescents who graffiti, including parental, family, behavioural and psychological problems and that these should be taken into consideration when designing early intervention and preventative approaches to graffiti behaviour.

Martin, G, Richardson, A., Bergen, H., Roeger, L. and Stephen Allison: *Graffiti and Disorder : Local Government, Law Enforcement and Community Responses*: paper presented at the Australian Institute of Criminology Conference 18-19 August 2003.

A previous study, *A Graffiti Culture Research Report*, was undertaken by Alan Hardy for the South Australian Government in 2002. It found that:

- the causes of graffiti are multiple but stem mainly from a lack of 'legitimate' activities for young people to immerse themselves in
- the vast majority of persons are introduced to graffiti through friends or acquaintances
- once exposed to the techniques of illicit writing, many make a *conscious* decision to continue engaging in such activities because of the *pleasure* they derive from it
- graffiti writing should *not* be seen solely in terms of the desire to be recognised—instead, it is also an activity that evokes strong feelings of self-esteem, satisfaction, and happiness within those who write
- in a minority of cases, engagement in graffiti seems to function as a 'barrier' to the perpetration of more serious criminal activity
- the stereotype of graffiti writers as 'mindless hooligans' is inapplicable
- the vast majority of writers have strict rules about where they will and will not write, whether they will or will not steal paint, whether they will or will not engage in other types of crime,

- and whether they write alone or as part of a crew
- although they have much in common, there are generally different motivations underpinning the actions of taggers as against those who piece
- many writers view with disdain the activities of taggers (especially the advent of so-called 'bombing runs' where a certain area is covered with multiple tags in as little time as possible)
- zero tolerance has little deterrent effect on illegal writing (although many writers support zero tolerance stances toward tagging)
- whilst rapid response strategies are successful in some instances, they are highly unlikely to deter those strongly committed to writing
- there is near unanimous support for legal walls and other initiatives which would allow the artistic skills of writers to be displayed to wider audiences
- there is a high probability that legal walls and other initiatives will help reduce the amount of illegal writing.

With these general findings in mind, the specific issues and trends emerging from interviews are discussed below.

#### **Discussion starter**

- Has anyone in the group ever painted or sprayed graffiti? If yes, and you feel comfortable talking about it, you might tell others why you did it and what you felt while you were doing it and afterwards.

#### **Addressing graffiti: Some options**

The NSW Graffiti Information website aims to address the concern in the community about the financial and social cost of illegal graffiti. An initiative of the New South Wales Government, the site is one of many actions on illegal graffiti the Government is taking through the NSW Graffiti Solutions Program and relevant government agencies.

##### *'Keep it Street: Aerosol Art Exhibition'*

An exhibition showcasing graffiti objects, paintings, installations and screen projections created by local young people aged 12–24 years was displayed at the Blacktown Arts Centre, 25 March to 17 April, 0000. The exhibition was jointly funded by the Blacktown City Council and the Beat Graffiti Grants Scheme, with further support from the Blacktown Youth Services Association.

##### *NSW Graffiti Solutions Handbook*

The Graffiti Solutions Handbook is now online. It is a resource for local councils, planners, designers and developers. It provides strategies and project ideas such as legal graffiti projects, designing buildings to reduce opportunities for crime, as well as ideas for protection and removal.

##### *Beat Graffiti Grants Scheme*

The Crime Prevention Division of the NSW Attorney-General's Department administers the Beat Graffiti Grants Scheme. Under the Scheme, funding grants of up to \$15,000 are available in categories which include: Graffiti in Schools, Graffiti in Transport, Aboriginal Art and Reconciliation, Community Pride plus Graffiti and the Community.

##### *Fines increase*

From 1 September 2003, many fines and penalties for offences committed on CityRail and CountryLink trains, stations and property increased. State Rail Transit Officers are now able to issue

\$400 on-the-spot fines. The maximum penalty for graffiti or vandalism offences is now \$2200.

*New legislation banning the sale of spray paint cans to persons under 18*

Under the Summary Offences Act 1988 (Section 10c), it is now illegal for anyone to sell spray paint cans to persons under the age of 18. The new law commenced on 1 September 2003.

If an employee breaches this provision, the employer and employee are each liable. This is the case even if the employee acted without the employer's authority or against instructions.

Retailers have the right to ask for proof of identity (ID) if they suspect a customer wishing to purchase spray paint is under the age of 18.

Retailers have been sent a Resource Kit which includes information about the new law and point of sale signage. If retailers have not yet received a kit they can obtain one by telephoning a Fair Trading Centre on 13 32 20.

*Legal Art—A Showcase of Beat Graffiti Grant Scheme Projects.*

This booklet details 84 projects funded under the Beat Graffiti Grants Scheme from 1999 and 2000, and includes photos of artwork produced as part of the projects.

*Graffiti Clean Up—Community Service Order Scheme*

Young offenders on community service orders are helping to clean up graffiti across the state. The NSW government has committed resources to equip and supervise the operation of clean up teams.

*Legal graffiti sites*

The Newcastle Community Arts Graffiti Project established places where people could legally paint graffiti. The project aimed to redirect graffiti artists from illegal to legal work and develop their skills, both artistic and managerial. Most of those targeted were aged from 13 to 20 years. The result was a reduction in illegal graffiti and tagging in the area.

Many graffiti writers see themselves as artists, not criminals or vandals. One convicted graffitiist went on to design covers for record companies and obtain permission from builders to paint on their hoardings. Legal spaces provide an outlet that is more artistically fulfilling than writing tags on trains and a wider audience, meeting the desire of graffitiists for recognition.<sup>17</sup>

*Restricting access to paints*

In some parts of the US, authorities have tried to tackle the problem by restricting sales of spray paint.

Some cities in America, primarily on the West Coast, have adopted ... [restrictive] by-laws ... retailers are required to keep spray paint locked in a case that only store employees are allowed to open. In addition to the 'spray paint by request' requirement, many lock-up provisions make it unlawful to sell spray paint to minors. In 1992, the city of Chicago completely banned the retail sale of the product, making it unlawful to sell spray paint within the city limits.

Restrictions on the sale of spray paint, however, have failed to stop or even slow the wave of graffiti. Taggers and their crews are so motivated to seek 'fame' in their communities through their tags that they will find any means to vandalise public or

private property. In lock-up cities, and even in Chicago, taggers are able to go to the next community and obtain graffiti tools. In some instances, taggers have used mail order distribution networks to obtain these products. In other cases, taggers will make substitution products... Given these facts, it is clear that restrictions on the sale of the product do not stop the vandals from 'tagging'.

From the Neighbourhood Watch website <http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/graffiti.htm>

#### **Let us spray—councils to commission graffiti artists**

Solomon Ilios is from the new school of thought on graffiti: councils are wasting money on graffiti removal and would spend it better on commissioning 'artists' to decorate residential and business walls.

'You'll never stop graffiti as long as there are authorities saying we are going to stop graffiti,' he says. 'That just ignites more people to do it.'

Councils are rolling out new initiatives to rid Melbourne's streets of offensive graffiti. While many opt for the zero tolerance approach, others are choosing to work with young people to tackle the problem.

Dandenong Council spends \$130,000 yearly on graffiti programs, and while some of this is for graffiti removal, a large proportion is spent on graffiti murals.

According to Mr Ilios, who works with young people in one of the council's graffiti programs, there needs to be a distinction between graffiti art and graffiti tags, with the former being of cultural value and the latter being vandalism.

He says Melbourne is internationally respected for its graffiti art and by having more of it around, there will be less tagging.

'Most of the experienced artists are not going around tagging trains,' he says. 'If the taggers see graffiti art, they don't destroy it because they respect it.'

Port Phillip Council also recognises the value of graffiti murals, and is contributing \$170,000 to two projects planned for St Kilda and South Melbourne. The council's graffiti project officer Andrew Davis says their approach is based on taking 'a more understanding, humanised view' of why people graffiti walls.

But Brendan Fitzsimmons, manager of community safety for the City of Casey, says the idea that graffiti is a form of expression is ridiculous. 'If they want to express themselves, my advice is that they use a pencil and paper,' he says. 'People who vandalise the property of others are criminals. That is how the City of Casey sees them.'

Casey's hardline approach appears to have worked—since its zero-tolerance program was introduced in 2002, the incidence of graffiti has fallen every year. Over the past year, the area affected by graffiti has reduced from about 2000 square metres to 600 square metres. The cost of removal is expected to fall from \$147,000 in 2000–01 to \$60,000 in 2004–05.

Similar success has been achieved by Melbourne City Council, where the council provides graffiti removal packs and paint vouchers to traders and residents. Lord Mayor John So said council spending on graffiti had dropped from \$356,000 in 2001–02 to \$200,000 in the last financial year.

Yarra Council arguably has the biggest problem with graffiti crime, with Richmond and Fitzroy falling within its boundaries. The council has identified 'graffiti hotspots' such as Swan Street in Richmond, where new graffiti murals will feature.

Darebin and Brimbank councils are running pilot projects this year where they will offer cleaning kits to local residents and businesses. The Government is also considering introducing a statewide graffiti tag database that would record when and where tags are spotted".

*Sunday Age* 4 July 2004

### **Discussion starters**

- What is your response to these approaches? You might split into smaller groups and spend 5–10 minutes discussing one option each, perhaps looking at advantages and disadvantages. Note key points so you can pass them on to the whole group.
- If you see graffiti as an issue in your community, do you know what efforts are being made to address it? If not, where could you find out?
- What ideas would you suggest to tackle the problem? Who could you talk to about your ideas? Who would you need to work with to make a difference? Is anyone in the group interested in developing your ideas or approaching other groups in the community who might be interested in working on the issue too?

### **Wind-up**

The last part of each learning circle session is an opportunity to reflect on what has been learned, to evaluate how the session has gone, and to allocate any tasks the group agrees need to be done before the next session. You could sum up your discussion under these headings:

#### **Difficult points**

- Are there any areas where you need more information? You might like to invite a guest speaker or find more information from an expert group or government department. Don't forget local libraries, community groups and the Internet.
- Summarise those areas where you have agreed to disagree. Minority views are valid.

#### **Decisions**

- Is there anything that the whole group has decided about your discussion?
- Is there anything you would like to do differently next time?
- Did you achieve what you had hoped?
- Is there any other action you want to take? This might include contacting your local council or politicians, sharing a meal or watching a video.

#### **Finally**

- Remember to collect articles for your media file.

## **Additional Resources**

### **Security tips from Crime Stoppers and Neighbourhood Watch**

Carelessness accounts for a lot of house robberies—nearly 20 per cent in New South Wales. In some cases thieves only had to turn a key left in the lock or look under the door mat.

The object of securing a home properly is to deter thieves. A determined thief may still get in, but a few simple precautions can slow an offender's entry and increase his chances of being caught (offenders are overwhelmingly male). Household burglaries involve three factors: the victim, the desire, and the opportunity. On your own you can't do much about the first two, but you can reduce the opportunity.

### **Reducing crime in your neighbourhood**

- Look out for your neighbours. If you notice something suspicious, report it to the police.
- If you see people looking or peering over side gates and through windows, speak to them. They will move on if challenged.
- If you hear breaking glass or an alarm, call the police. Quick action might prevent a burglary.
- Find out about support programs such as Neighbourhood Watch in your community. A range of specific services is also available for the elderly and people who live alone.

### **Making your home secure**

- Double-keyed deadlocks on all perimeter doors and key-operated locks on accessible windows will deter entry. Alarm systems and security doors are also effective.
- Effective locks make it harder for burglars to enter and prevent thieves from leaving other than by the way they entered. This minimises what they can steal—it is difficult to carry bulky items such as televisions and videos through a broken window.
- Plastic drainpipes and walls should be free of attachments to prevent climbing. Fit skylights that open with appropriate locks or interior security grilles. Low front fences, trees and shrubs mean potential burglars can be easily seen. External doors should be well lit. The house number should be clearly visible from the street.
- Install a peep hole in your front door and fit a security chain so you can check who is there. A safe is useful to store valuable items such as jewellery and cash.
- Keep photographs of jewellery, paintings etc. to make it easy to identify them if stolen, and for insurance purposes. Engrave electrical equipment with your driver's licence number and the state you live in. This will help police identify your goods.
- Secure the garage and other exterior buildings (workshops or garden sheds) with padlocks. Lock up tools and other items that could be used to break into your house.
- Exterior lighting can be an effective deterrent, together with time switches to turn on and off items such as lights and radios while you are away from the house.

### **Being sensibly cautious**

- Lock doors and windows whenever you leave the house, even if it is just to go into the backyard or to the shop.
- Don't leave keys in the lock or hung by the back door. If a thief finds them, you may as well not have the locks.
- If you do leave a key in your security door, install a metal or plastic shield near the lock so that a hand or fingers can't get through and turn the key.
- Good security isn't about having the latest locks and systems, it's about using them.
- Leave spare keys with someone you trust, not in hiding places that are easily found.
- Don't leave out notes saying how long you will be away.
- Keep valuable documents in a bank or with a solicitor.
- Don't leave your house keys with your car keys when you have your vehicle serviced or when using a parking station.
- Home and car alarm systems need to be properly maintained. Have your systems serviced every two years. Replace any batteries at the same time.

- Strangers in your workplace should be attended to and assisted. Don't give potential thieves an opportunity to help themselves to keys and handbags.

#### Going away

- Make the house look lived in. Don't close blinds or curtains you normally leave open. Arrange for someone to change lights and curtains occasionally.
- Cancel milk, bread and newspaper deliveries. Get your local post office to hold your mail. Arrange for a neighbour to clear your letterbox of any material daily. Arrange for someone to mow your lawn if you are going to be away for a while.
- Let your local police know you will be away, and who has the key. Let a responsible person know where you are going and how to contact you in an emergency.

#### Reducing the risk of motor vehicle theft

- Never leave your keys on the vehicle or motorcycle, even in your own garage.
- Don't leave your engine running or the keys in the ignition when running quick errands.
- Never leave your registration papers or driver's licence in the vehicle—they can be used to falsify ownership.
- Never leave valuables in view.
- Always park your vehicle in a secured parking station. If you can't, park in a well lit, busy area.
- Install a good quality alarm system.

#### More information

##### Graffiti

Allison Miller & Associates 2002, *SA Graffiti Hotline Pilot Evaluation Project: final report*, South Australia Attorney-General's Department, Crime Prevention Unit  
<http://www.cpu.sa.gov.au/Hotline%20Eval%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Crime Prevention Victoria 2002, *Graffiti: a toolkit for local organisations*  
Available at <http://www.crimeprevention.vic.gov.au/>

*Graffiti and disorder: local government, law enforcement and community responses* (2003). Papers from the conference organised by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Australian Local Government Association  
<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/2003-graffiti/>

KESAB Environmental Solutions 2002, *Graffiti gone: KESAB anti-graffiti project*  
<http://www.kesab.asn.au/graffiti/index.htm>

Ministerial Crime Prevention Council and Crime Prevention Victoria 2003, *Grappling with graffiti: a graffiti management strategy for Victoria*  
Available at <http://www.crimeprevention.vic.gov.au/>

New South Wales Government, *NSW graffiti information website*  
<http://www.graffiti.nsw.gov.au/>

Western Australia Office of Crime Prevention, *Graffiti information*  
<http://www.crimeprevention.wa.gov.au/html/graf1.cfm>

##### Motor vehicle theft

*Car Safe–National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council*

<http://www.carsafe.com.au/index.html>

Hill, P 1998, *Preventing car theft in Australia: “golden opportunity” for partnerships*

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi86.html>

National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council 2002, *Guide to tackling car theft for local communities*

<http://www.carsafe.com.au/pdf/guide.pdf>

*Reducing car theft: how low can we go?* (2000)

Papers from the conference organised by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council

<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/cartheft/>

NRMA CrimeSafe booklet, *How to secure your car.*

[http://www.nrma.com.au/pub/nrma/community/crime-prevention/media/NRMA\\_CrimeSafe\\_car\\_Security.pdf](http://www.nrma.com.au/pub/nrma/community/crime-prevention/media/NRMA_CrimeSafe_car_Security.pdf)

Each state and territory Police Service produces a range of pamphlets and brochures aimed at crime prevention, including home and business security. The following sample of publications produced by the Western Australian Police Service gives you an idea of what is available:

*10 steps to home security*

*An introduction to Rural Watch*

*Handbag snatch*

*How neighbours can look out for neighbours*

*Identification*

*Immobiliser scheme*

*Industrial alarm systems*

*Intruder alarms*

*Neighbourhood Watch Operation*

*Neighbourhood Watch Operation Manual*

*Prevent shopstealing*

*Rural Watch suspicious persons booklet*

*Safes*

*Security alarm systems*

*Security lighting*

*Welcome to Neighbourhood Watch*

*Your 10-point home security checklist*

## **Burglary**

Crime Reduction (UK), *Domestic burglary toolkit*

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/db00.htm>

Goodwin, V 2002, ‘Burglary and repeat victimisation in Tasmania’, paper presented at the *Crime prevention conference*

<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/crimpre/goodwin.html>

Guidi S, Townsley M, and Homel R 1997, ‘Repeat break and enter crimes’, paper presented at the *Second National Outlook Symposium on Crime in Australia*

<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/outlook97/homl.html>

Holder R 1997, 'Repeat victimisation and the role of the crime victim in prevention strategies', paper presented at the *Second National Outlook Symposium on Crime in Australia*  
<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/outlook97/holder.html>

Holder, R, Makkai, T and Payne, J 2004, *Crime victims and the prevention of residential burglary: report of the ACT burglary victims response project 2004*  
<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/reports/2004-02-burglary.html>

Home Office (UK), Burglary publications  
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/burglary1.html>

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<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rpp/15/>

Queensland Criminal Justice Commission 2001, *Lightning strikes twice: preventing repeat home burglary*  
[http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/ncp/Publications/Lightning/AG%20Report\\_03.html](http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/ncp/Publications/Lightning/AG%20Report_03.html)

Taplin, S, Fletcher, W, McKenzie, D and Flaherty, B 2001, *Safer towns and cities housebreaking reduction project evaluation report*  
[http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/cpd.nsf/pages/stc\\_hrreport](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/cpd.nsf/pages/stc_hrreport)

Weatherburn D and Grabosky P N 1997, 'Strategic approaches to property crime', paper presented at the *Second National Outlook Symposium on Crime in Australia*  
<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/outlook97/weather.html>

## Notes

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<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rpp/15/index.html>.

2 Susanna Lobez, *The Law Report*, ABC Radio National, 4 May 1999.

3 ABS, *Recorded Crime Australia 2000*, released 30 May 2001, p. 5.

4 ABS, *Crime and Safety Australia 1998*, p. 6.

5 ABS, *Recorded Crime Australia 2000*, released 30 May 2001, p. 7.

6 Jimmy, a former burglar who broke into more than 1,500 homes during a ten-year career in Brisbane and Sydney before spending time in Long Bay Prison, quoted in Sam de Brito, 'To catch a thief', *Vive*, 1999.

7 See the South Australian Neighbourhood Watch website at:  
<http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/about.htm>.

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11 Mayhew, P 2003, *Counting the costs of crime in Australia: Technical Report*. Technical and Background Paper Series no. 4, Australian Institute of Criminology: Canberra.

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13 *Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Plan*, as contained in *Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Plan-Final Report of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Task Force*, September 1997.

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