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Vehicle Theft Prevention Month: Hochul advises drivers on how to protect themselves

In first 6 months of 2026, DMV recovered 140 stolen vehicles

Submitted by the Office of Gov. Kathy Hochul

During Vehicle Theft Prevention Month, Gov. Kathy Hochul urged New Yorkers to take steps to protect their vehicles from theft. In the first six months of this year, investigators for the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles recovered 140 stolen vehicles worth \$4.3 million. In addition, DMV also recovered eight stolen auto parts with a value of almost \$13,000.

"For most New Yorkers, their car is one of their biggest investments, and losing one to a thief can cause financial loss and hardship," Hochul said. "We have worked hard in New York to deter car theft, and we urge owners to take some simple steps to protect their own vehicles. Just as we have fought to lower the cost of car insurance, the DMV works with customers to recoup money they have lost due to stolen cars and parts."

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), more than 650,000 drivers in the U.S. fall victim to this crime every year, with a car being stolen every 48 seconds.

NYS DMV Acting Commissioner Christian Jackstadt said, "A car is vitally important to millions of New Yorkers, and to find your car missing is immensely stressful and costly. Our investigators work hard to recover stolen automobiles and to help set things right for victims of these crimes. You, too, can take steps to protect your investment in your vehicle."

Hochul has actively called for increased efforts to improve public safety and traffic safety by working to reduce theft and to make owning a car more affordable for New Yorkers. This year, she successfully urged the Legislature to address the growing cost of auto insurance by combatting fraud, limiting damages paid out to bad

actors, and making sure consumers – not insurance companies – are given priority.

The governor's push to crack down on vehicle theft has shown results. In 2023, she initiated a five-point plan called the comprehensive auto-theft reduction strategy (CARS). As part of that plan, New York State Police increased patrols in high-theft areas; and the state launched a vehicle theft prevention website to provide resources and education to help New Yorkers take their own measures to prevent auto theft. From 2024-25, total reported vehicle thefts across New York are down by about 15%.

New York State Police Superintendent Steven G. James said, "Motor vehicle theft is a multi-jurisdictional crime that requires a collaborative effort to avert car thefts. We, along with our law enforcement partners, are here to address this problem at its forefront with the same seriousness and dedication we give to all crimes we investigate. Through targeted enforcement and innovative resources for car owners, we can reduce the number of vehicle thefts in New York state."

New York State Division of Criminal Justice Commissioner Rossana Rosado said, "Having your vehicle stolen is costly, stressful and disruptive. Staying alert and taking preventive measures make a real difference in reducing these crimes. I want to thank our law enforcement partners across New York state who continue to work tirelessly to recover stolen vehicles and hold those responsible accountable."

Here is guidance on how to protect your vehicle from being stolen:

- When you park, close and lock all windows and doors.
- Do not leave your key fob in the vehicle.
- Park in well-lit areas if possible.
- Do not leave valuables in your vehicle, especially if they are visible.

DMV also offered guidance on steps one can take to avoid unintentionally buying a stolen vehicle.

- Before making a decision to purchase a vehicle, consumers are strongly encouraged to obtain an independent vehicle inspection to examine the vehicle identification number (VIN) found in various locations on the vehicle, get a vehicle history report via the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS) or other available vehicle information resources.
- The U.S. Department of Justice's NMVTIS, at vehiclehistory.bja.ojp.gov, is an online system that offers accurate information about a vehicle's title, odometer data, and certain damage history. NMVTIS was designed to protect consumers from fraud and unsafe vehicles and to keep stolen vehicles from being resold. Consumers can expect to pay up to \$4 per report.
- The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), at www.nicb.org, maintains a free database that includes flood damage and other information so people can investigate a car's history by its vehicle identification number. Check the VIN before buying a used vehicle to make sure it was not stolen or flooded. By entering the VIN of the vehicle they are looking to buy, consumers can learn if the vehicle was ever flooded or stolen. People can search up to five VINs per day.
- Look for odometer discrepancies.
- Be cautious about buying a vehicle locally with out-of-state titles or a car being sold with a NY title that has out-of-state inspection stickers, plates or temporary paper plates.
- The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) provides used car buying tips on its website: www.ftc.gov.

In 2024, DMV warned consumers about a surge in online car sales scams and offered guidance on how to protect yourself. Extra caution should be taken when buying vehicles in online private sales.

DMV has previously warned consumers about purchasing vehicles damaged by flooding. Flood damage can affect the engine or transmission, corrode wiring, harm the airbag or impair the vehicle's computers – damage that might not be readily visible.

Some sellers take the vehicle from a flooded area and get a new title in a different state before trying to sell it. Consumers should be aware when purchasing used vehicles with titles issued during hurricane periods, even if the title is not from a state affected by the storm.

If your vehicle is stolen, report it to the police and your auto insurance company as soon as possible. The police will enter the information into national and state auto theft computer records. The theft will be noted on your vehicle title record to help prevent someone from selling the vehicle or applying for a title.

Also ask the police to complete a "Report of Lost or Stolen Motor Vehicle Items" form (MV-78B) for your stolen plates, which you must submit to the DMV. If only your license plates are stolen, you must still submit the MV-78B form to the DMV along with your vehicle registration.

Find additional information on stolen and recovered vehicles and insurance lapses on stolen vehicles on the DMV website. The DMV also offers additional tips to protect yourself when buying a vehicle.

For more information about DMV, follow on Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Kearns: Buyer beware if shopping for new or used car

Guest Editorial by Erie County Clerk Michael Kearns

Buying a vehicle is one of the biggest financial decisions many people make, and today's car shoppers are more informed than ever. Whether you're purchasing your first car, upgrading to a newer model, or shopping for a dependable used vehicle, taking time to do your homework can save you money, frustration, and future headaches.

While private sales may sometimes offer lower prices, licensed dealerships often provide additional consumer protection, financing options, warranties and support after the sale. No matter where you choose to buy, it's important to understand exactly what you're purchasing before signing on the dotted line.

Before you begin shopping, consider your budget, your transportation

needs, insurance costs, maintenance expenses, and the vehicle's reliability. Research the vehicle's history, compare market values, and learn about the dealer or seller. An informed buyer is far more likely to drive away with confidence.

Many consumers are surprised to learn that every automobile dealer in New York, both large dealerships and small-independent dealerships, must be properly registered with the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles. Licensed dealers are required to follow both state and federal consumer protection laws designed to safeguard your investment when purchasing a new, used, or even salvage vehicle.

When buying a used vehicle from a licensed dealer, New York law requires the dealer to certify in writing that the vehicle is in condition and repair

to provide satisfactory and adequate service under normal use. The vehicle must also include all safety equipment and emissions controls required by law for its model year. New vehicles are further protected through manufacturer warranties.

With more than 10 million registered vehicles traveling New York's roads, the work of the NYS DMV and the Erie County Auto Bureau has never been more important. Beyond issuing registrations, titles, and driver's licenses, these agencies help ensure vehicle transactions are conducted fairly, legally and safely, while providing consumers with the information they need to make informed decisions.

To help residents navigate the vehicle-buying process, the Erie County Auto Bureau offers a free consumer guide titled "Let the Buyer Be Aware."

This easy-to-read brochure explains your rights as a buyer, outlines important laws governing vehicle sales, and provides practical tips to help you avoid costly mistakes before making a purchase.

A little preparation goes a long way. Understanding your rights, knowing what questions to ask, and recognizing the protections available under New York law can make the difference between a stressful experience and a smart investment.

To request a free copy of "Let the Buyer Be Aware," visit the clerk's help desk at <https://clerkhelp.erie.gov> or contact the Erie County clerk's outreach center at 716-858-8864. Our office is committed to providing the information and resources you need to make informed decisions and purchase with confidence.

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