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BC NEWS

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Bait cars will be out in force during Games

Tuesday, January 26th, 2010 | 11:41 pm



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Canwest News Service

Police will flood major parking lots and transit hubs with bait cars during the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Integrated Municipal Provincial Auto Crime Team's initiative aims to keep auto theft at a six-year low while the province hosts more visitors than it ever has, said B.C. Solicitor-general Kash Heed in a statement released Tuesday. An estimated 250,000 people are expected to take public transit during the Olympics.

Bait cars are equipped with cameras, microphones and engine shutdown technology that can be operated remotely by the police, allowing them to easily apprehend and convict thieves who take the cars.

"Strategic deployment of bait cars, which has cut auto crime by more than half since 2003, will provide drivers with greater peace of mind when they leave their vehicles for the day," said Heed.

An undisclosed number of bait cars, trucks and vans will be deployed to all 22 Park & Ride locations in Metro Vancouver, five Vanoc parking and departure hubs and Games training and preparation centres.

Some bait cars will also be stocked with valuables such as cameras and laptops marked with MicroDot DNA technology to tempt thieves looking for a quick score.

MicroDots are microscopic dots that each contain serial numbers registered to IMPACT. The dots are planted on the valuables, making them easy to identify as stolen and providing indisputable evidence in court.

February's initiative will serve as a pilot project for the MicroDot DNA technology, which is expected to become a permanent part of the bait car program, said IMPACT spokesman Sgt. Gord Elias.

"We used to concentrate mostly on theft of vehicles," he said. "We're now ramping it up and we're also going to concentrate on theft from vehicles as well."

Police will also deploy a number of undercover cars equipped with automatic licence-plate recognition technology, capable of scanning up to 600 plates an hour.

When an officer in one of these cars passes a stolen car, the technology automatically photographs the stolen car and an alarm sounds inside the officer's car.

Auto thefts throughout Metro Vancouver dropped 61 per cent from 2003 to 2009, according to theft-of-vehicle incidents reported to ICBC.

In Vancouver, 4,580 auto thefts were reported in 2009, compared to 10,950 in 2003 — a 58 per cent drop.

Elias believes the program's success can be attributed to highly publicized bait car arrests acting as a deterrent.

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