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Black Press



COURTESY IMPACT

Bait Cars take gold in car theft crackdown

Olympic initiative results in lowest number of stolen vehicles in 14 years

Black Press

A PROMISED police crackdown against car thieves during the Winter Olympics had the desired effect, according to just-released crime statistics.

During February, the number of car thefts reported to ICBC dropped 17 per cent in Surrey.

The Delta and White Rock rates, already among the lowest in Metro Vancouver, were unchanged. Those figures are based on a comparison with the same period the previous year.

Car break-ins also dropped by 20 per cent in Surrey, and 50 per cent in White Rock.

The Delta theft-from-vehicles rate, already low, was unchanged.

Province-wide, there were 22 per cent fewer thefts and 15 per cent fewer break-ins, with overall numbers falling to a 14-year low.

An image from a Bait Car poster shows an alleged car thief in action.

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Bait Cars: Laptops left in sight

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Before the Olympics started, the provincial government announced there would be stepped-up enforcement with bait cars during the Olympics to make sure visitors to the Games didn't have their experience ruined by vehicle theft.

The Integrated Municipal Provincial Auto Crime Team (IMPACT) planted bait cars at transit park-and-ride lots, Olympic training centres and Winter

Games parking and departure hubs.

IMPACT would not comment on speculation some of the bait cars bore out-of-province licence plates to make thieves believe they were stealing visiting vehicles.

"We change our bait cars all the time," was all IMPACT spokesman Sgt. Gord Elias would say.

Some of the bait cars had cameras and laptops left out to lure thieves.

They were marked with laser-etched MicroDotDNA the

size of a grain of sand.

IMPACT computers crunched numbers from crime reports to locate the bait cars and surveillance teams in areas where thieves were likely to be most active.

Officers patrolled with undercover cars equipped with automatic licence plate recognition technology to scan plates and locate stolen vehicles in parking lots and on the road.

"We warned car thieves that bait cars would be everywhere during the Games,

and it appears they got the message," B.C. Solicitor General Mike de Jong said.

Since bait cars hit B.C. roads in 2004, ICBC's stolen vehicle claims have been cut from \$98 million in 2003 to \$47 million in 2009 while break-in-related claim costs have fallen to \$27 million from \$17 million.

For more information on IMPACT's Bait Car program, go to baitcar.com. For auto theft statistics and avoidance tips, visit www.icbc.com.

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