

Police launch next phase of Operation Auto Guard

York Regional Police have launched the next phase of their work to combat carjackings and auto thefts.

Operation Auto Guard 2.0 was launched by the YRP on October 3. They say this next phase will 'build on the success' of last year's Operation Auto Guard and will include additional enforcement measures, community engagement, and 'proven crime prevention strategies.'

'The first Operation Auto Guard was a combined campaign of crime prevention efforts and targeted enforcement, with a focus on disrupting organized crime groups who steal vehicles, then ship them overseas,' said the YRP. 'It led to the recovery of 80 vehicles worth more than \$5 million, with 56 people facing almost 300 charges.'

'Auto Guard 2.0 will continue to use a data-driven approach to identify hot spots for vehicle theft and YRP will focus enforcement and crime prevention efforts in these areas. Officers will be deployed into identified hot-spot neighbourhoods to provide crime prevention tips directly to residents.'

At last week's announcement, YRP Chief Jim MacSween said Operation Auto Guard has made a 'significant impact in helping to combat rising rates of auto theft' throughout York Region.

'From 2020 to 2023, the number of vehicles stolen in York Region increased by almost 300 per cent. Although the numbers are still very high, as of this week there have been approximately 2,440 vehicles stolen in York Region, down from 3,460 at this time last year, representing approximately a 31 per cent decrease from last year,' he said. 'While we don't want to celebrate too much, we do have to acknowledge the fact that a lot of the efforts that are paying off across all governments, our police services, our partners, is having an impact.'

'The brazen and violent nature of auto theft has escalated due to the involvement of organized crime, which has extended its reach of these criminals beyond our borders, stealing vehicles from crowded parking lots, taking mere seconds to steal high end vehicles from driveways. They work in teams to scout out vehicles in advance as their criminal organizations arrange delivery to overseas locations to complete the lucrative, illegal circle. We know that combatting these extensive criminal activities will take more than one campaign, more than one police service, and more than one approach. The investigators here at YRP are working with other police services in joint force operations across the GTA and organizations like Equite and the Canada Border Services Agency. We will continue to work across all levels of government, with law enforcement, community agencies and citizens to end auto theft.'

The YRP recommends several steps to residents to help protect themselves and their vehicles: lighting and security cameras; steering wheel locks; storing car keys in Faraday bags; park in a garage if possible; and install a GPS tracker or kill switch in vehicles.

In combatting car jackings, they also recommend: be aware of your surroundings; keep car doors locked while driving; and park in populated, well-lit areas.

By Brock Weir