

Province boosts YRP's Operation Auto Guard, drive to stamp out car thefts



The York Regional Police will receive \$900,000 from the Provincial Government over the next five years to help the local police service pump the brakes on a rash of auto thefts.

The funding was announced at the YRP's Aurora headquarters on Friday morning by Ontario Solicitor General Michael Kerzner. His announcement was made in conjunction with the results of Operation Auto Guard, an initiative launched by the YRP in September which resulted in 56 people being charged with 284 offences and 80 vehicles worth more than \$5 million being seized.

"The people of Ontario have called for action to combat auto theft and this government has delivered," said Kerzner. "This [has] an urgency and relevance for us to be here today. Public safety is amongst the highest priorities for this government and we all have an inherent right to live safely in our own homes and communities and we will always have the backs of everyone who keeps our Province safe.

"These criminals, who feel they can steal our cars whenever they want, are not only here, but it is throughout Ontario and is completely unacceptable. With this funding, YRP will have increased resources to fight auto theft where criminals are, and together we will get it done."

YRP Chief Jim MacSween said vehicle theft has been rising rapidly in recent years, increasing by more than 200 per cent over the last five years.

"Last year, we had 2,187 vehicles stolen in York Region and in 2023 we've had 4,294 stolen so far and are on pace for a total of 4,637 vehicles stolen by the end of this year" and that is just in York Region," said MacSween. "We know that combatting these extensive criminal activities will take more than one campaign, more than one police service, and more than one approach.

"We will be spending this money wisely on data-driven enforcement, dedicated investigative teams, and acquiring specialized resources and equipment. The funding will also help us expand our data collection and analysis efforts to better examine links to organized crime and other criminal activity."

Further, Chief MacSween said he and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police will "urge those responsible for the registration of vehicles to audit their processes and implement practices designed to eliminate fraudulent registration of stolen vehicles."

"This resolution," he added, "will also ask the Government of Canada to strengthen and fund border controls to prevent vehicle exports in order to disrupt any organized crime [and] finally to require vehicles sold in Canada to include effective security devices."

The team behind Operation Auto Guard created heat maps to identify communities in York Region that were particularly prone to auto thefts, with a particular focus on Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan. Doing so allowed officers to approach homeowners directly to let them know they were at risk of having their vehicles stolen, offer tips, and, according to the YRP, "take an active role in crime prevention."

"Our focus on crime prevention included having officers from our Auxiliary, Community Services, and Community Oriented Response Units fan out across these neighbourhoods, handing out cards with crime prevention tips in multiple languages and giving away more than 24,000 Faraday bags, used to block the signal-duplicating devices that replicate key fobs," said the YRP. "Officers also distributed Faraday bags when conducting traffic stops and while attending various community forums and events."

"During the operation, police attended more than 100 locations where we educated citizens on auto thefts and how to prevent them and protect themselves, including at town hall community forums, religious institutions, malls, parking lots and car dealerships. We believe our proactive activities had a significant impact, in our community at large, but also in the specific neighbourhoods being victimized."

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