

St. Paul Police use bait cars to catch thieves targeting idling vehicles

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ST. PAUL, Minn. (FOX 9) - St. Paul Police say 37 cars have been stolen over the last two weeks and more than half of them were cars that were left running.

So, they sought to change that.

Even before the sun came up, a trap was being set on St. Paul's east side Thursday morning.

"Unfortunately, the weather is pretty warm, but if you look, we should have pretty good foot traffic along Payne Avenue," said Sgt. **Jason Brubaker**, of St. Paul PD.

Every trap needs bait and in this case, the lure is on four wheels.

"We're going to put a couple of lines in the water and see if we can catch some fish," Brubaker said.

St. Paul Police, with help from Maplewood Police, put two bait cars near the corner of Payne and Magnolia Avenues with their engines running and their doors unlocked.

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"What we are looking for is people looking for a crime of opportunity," Brubaker said. "They see a car warming up. It's extremely quick. They pop into a car and they are gone."

That's what happened a couple of months ago when the driver of a car left his engine running when he went into a convenience store. Within about a minute, another car pulled up and one of its occupants notices the empty care idling.

The person got his friend to hop in it with him and they took off.

"For some people whose vehicles are being taken, it's the most expensive thing they own. If they can't get to their job, can't get their paycheck, trying to get to the doctor's appointment trying to get to school. It not only affects that person, it affects the entire family," Brubaker said.

Unlike the man who stole the bait car back in June, there wasn't even a nibble on the trap on the east side Thursday, but police say their bait cars will be back and anyone who tries to take one for a ride will get caught.

"We want to let criminals know we're out here and if you take one of these vehicles, it may end up being the St. Paul Police Department's and hopefully we'll have that deterrent on that," Brubaker added.

Police also say it's not all on the thieves, as leaving your car running is against the law. If a police officer comes across it, you could end up with a ticket as well as a fine.

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