

Dog Theft on the Rise

The American Kennel Club offers tips to protect your dog from being stolen.

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The American Kennel Club is warning pet owners and breeders about an alarming rise in the number of dog thefts in recent months. From parking lots to pet stores and even backyards, more dogs are disappearing. In the first three months of 2008, the AKC reports they've tracked more than 30 thefts from news and customer reports, compared to only ten for all twelve months of 2007.

Media reports have chronicled the escalation of these dognappings from all around the country. Incidents have included armed robbers entering a dog breeder's home, tiny puppies being stuffed into purses at pet stores, and most recently, purebred pets being snatched from cars in parking lots and even shelters.

"The value of pets in people's lives has been on the rise for a long time, and now we are seeing thieves trying to capitalize on this," says AKC spokesperson Lisa Peterson. "Whether they seek to resell the dog, collect a ransom or breed the dogs and sell their offspring, thieves seem to be attuned to the increased financial and emotional value pets have in our lives. Losing a treasured family pet is devastating to the owner."

The AKC offers the following advice to prevent your dog from being targeted:

At home

Don't leave your dog unattended in your yard. Dogs left outdoors when no one is home for long periods of time can be potential targets, especially if you live in a rural area and the fenced-in yard or dog runs are visible from the street.

Keep purchase price to yourself. If strangers approach you to admire your dog during walks, don't answer questions about how much the dog cost or give details about where you live.

Breeders, be aware of home visits by potential puppy buyers. Criminals posing as would-be puppy buyers have visited breeder homes to snatch dogs, while other homes have been burglarized when the owner was away. From Yorkies in Los Angeles to Bulldogs in Connecticut, thieves have targeted young puppies of these coveted breeds.

On the road

Never leave your dog in an unattended car, even if it's locked. Even if you are gone for only a moment, an unlocked car is an invitation for trouble. Also leaving expensive items in the car such as a GPS unit or laptop will only invite thieves to break in and possibly allow the dog to escape.

Don't tie your dog outside a store. This popular practice among city-dwelling dog owners can be a recipe for disaster. If you need to go shopping, consider leaving the dog at home or with a friend.

One step further

Protect your dog with microchip identification. Collars and tags can be removed so make sure you have permanent ID with a microchip. Keep contact information current with your recovery service provider. Several pets have been recovered because of alert people scanning and discovering microchips.

If you suspect your dog has been stolen, immediately call the police or animal control in the area your pet was last seen.

Have fliers with a recent photo ready to go if your dog goes missing. Keep a photo of your dog in your wallet or on an easily accessible web account so that you can distribute immediately if your dog goes missing.