

Play it safe

Sex. Drugs. Rape. Murder. Drunk driving. Theft. These are but a few of the things happening right outside our doorways, yet most of the time we are totally oblivious to everything except what's directly affecting us.

We also have the silly notion that such atrocities "won't happen to me." We might as well forget that one right now. It can happen to us. And we need to be prepared.

The University Police Department is doing all it can to ensure the safety of students, staff and faculty on the A&M campus. As many people know,

officers watch campus parking areas from the rooftops of several campus buildings. But many may be unaware of the plainclothes police officers who sit on benches or walk around campus in the early evenings and at night.

The UPD is even experimenting with the use of electronic devices. Such methods are used in places like G. Rollie White Coliseum and the Memorial Student Center in the forms of marked money and censors.

According to Robert E. Wiatt, director of the UPD, these

methods are being used to catch the lawbreakers "in the act," as well as to deter the criminals altogether.

The best deterrent, however, is safety education. This is the main emphasis of crime prevention, Wiatt says.

The UPD works in conjunction with both the Bryan and College Station Police Departments and with the Brazos County Sheriff's Office to educate the public in such safety areas as locking your home and marking your valuables. Members of all the police departments are available to make safety

speeches to any interested group.

Wiatt says the police also work in cooperation with manufacturers of various kinds of locks to help teach people which locks are best for their needs.

"(Safety) education has got to be a blanket effect and has got to be continuous," Wiatt says. "If it's not continuous, people forget."

This education is important because misdemeanor crime is so prevalent at A&M.

"This University has historically led all others in misdemeanor thefts," Wiatt

It's 3 a.m.: Do you know where your car is?

(AP) — It's 3 in the morning, and the red Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme stands out like a traffic light on the darkened Boston side street. A thief breaks in, disables the ignition and steering locks and spirits the car away — in less than 20 seconds.

Olds Cutlass Supremes top the list of cars most likely to be stolen in Massachusetts. They're in good company. Across the country a car disappears twice a minute.

You can help find your car where you left it by understanding how thieves work and discouraging them from singling out your car, either by slowing them down or scaring them off. If your car is stolen, you can make it easier to find.

Almost a third of all car thefts occur in six big metropolitan areas: Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles and New York City.

But it isn't just where you live that increases your car's risk of being stolen; it's what you drive. Toyota Celicas and Supras, Volkswagen Beetles and Chevrolet Camaros are popular with thieves in California. And there has

been a lot of larcenous interest there lately in small pickups — Fords, Toyotas and Nissans. New York crooks target Oldsmobile Cutlass Supremes, Buick Rivas and Pontiac Trans Ams. Florida thieves favor Cadillac Eldorados, Mazda RX-7s and Chevrolet Corvettes. In Houston, Cadillacs, Oldsmobiles and full-size Chevrolet pickup trucks top the list of stolen vehicles.

You probably won't be slapped with a higher insurance premium if your car is stolen and most insurance companies won't drop you. But you will pay indirectly: whenever thefts go up, the entire area's rates tend to go up.

In the Northeast, the link between organized crime rings and the large number of chop shops has meant high comprehensive premiums. With a \$200 deductible, the theft insurance alone on a brand new Mercedes 300 TD sedan can run \$1,558 a year in New York City and \$943 in Boston. State Farm estimates that almost 40 percent of every car insurance premium goes to cover theft.

In some areas, a good anti-

theft device qualifies you for a discount on your comprehensive coverage.

The cost of insuring that Mercedes drops \$189 with an alarm in Boston and \$156 in New York City — enough to cover nearly half the cost of many anti-theft systems.

In the past two years, police have recovered roughly six out of 10 cars reported stolen, many of them stripped hulks. More successful recovery is expected due to a 1984 federal law requiring a vehicle identification number to be stamped on 14 key parts (12 parts on two-doors) of frequently stolen cars. More than 80 models, including the Pontiac Firebird, Chevrolet Camaro, Buick Riviera, Cadillac Eldorado and Oldsmobile Toronado, now arrive at the dealer with the VIN stamped on the transmission, engine, doors and bumpers.

Marking a vehicle is one of the best and cheapest ways to discourage a thieving interest in the parts. Etching is done with an acid-based compound or by sandblasting. Sand-etched numbers, which are harder to destroy than acid-etched

marks, cost as little as \$40 for the first four windows and \$5 each additional window or bumper and must be applied by a pro. You can buy an etching kit for as little as \$19.95 or have it done free by some local AAA chapters and police departments.

Electronic anti-theft devices have also put a dent in some types of thefts, especially the threat from amateur joyriders or petty thieves who steal radios, sunroofs, wheels and tires.

Some law enforcement officials aren't enthusiastic about the cheap and easy-to-install bars, which lock around steering wheels, and steering wheel collars, which lock around the steering column. Both are sold by the thousands in hardware and auto supply stores. Such devices may discourage a petty thief but not a professional.

Mass-produced anti-theft devices and original equipment installed by the car companies aren't sure bets, either. The more common the alarm system, the greater the risk it will be recognized and disarmed by thieves who know the systems.

The police generally have higher regard for the more sophisticated anti-theft devices, especially sensors that trigger an alarm whenever someone tries to open the trunk or hood, and "ignition kill" mechanisms that cut off the engine after it is started. But effectiveness varies all over the map, depending on the type of car and the alarm.

Seventeen models, including the Chevrolet Corvette, Toyota Supra, Chrysler Conquest, Cadillac Allante, Volvo 780 GLE and some Mercedes-Benz cars, now include some kind of anti-theft system as standard equipment. The Big Three automakers, Mercedes-Benz, Mazda and Porsche also sell optional systems on 27 models.

A Department of Transportation study reported that the Nissan 300ZX system, which sets off an alarm if someone tries to open any part of the car, has cut thefts in half. Mercedes-Benz alarms, which protect only the trunk and passenger compartments, have pushed down theft rates by 25 percent.