



6 Steps to Prevent Auto Thefts at Your Carwash

According to the Insurance Information Institute, there were 721,885 stolen vehicles in the U.S. in 2021. That's nearly 2,000 auto thefts per day. What's more, thieves are becoming more innovative. Automobile theft is a crime of opportunity, and a carwash can provide thieves with just the opportunity they are looking for.

Here are two scenarios that occurred:

- A woman dropped off her car at a carwash in Simi Valley, California. When the carwash was done, her car was picked up by someone posing as the owner. The theft took place in broad daylight during business hours.
- While vacuuming her car at a self-service carwash, a central Arkansas woman's car was stolen. A car pulled up next to her and two men got out. When the woman was hanging up the vacuum, one man ran up, jumped into the driver's seat of the woman's car, and took off.

Follow These Steps to Prevent Theft at Your Carwash

Put procedures in place

Once a customer has released their vehicle to be washed, detailed, or serviced, it's now in your care and custody. Make sure you:

1. Establish procedures for every vehicle that enters your property.
2. Ensure those procedures are followed at all times and by all employees.

Make a show of security

Visible security cameras serve more than one purpose. They will record someone making their way onto your property, can help you identify trespassers, and can serve as proof if any trespassers are prosecuted. Security cameras can also be deterrents against thieves. Criminals usually look for easy targets, and most will think twice about breaking into a carwash if they notice security cameras. Ensure your cameras do the following:

1. Get close up views of the cars both prior to the wash and after the wash
2. Capture license plates
3. Get views of potential areas of where there is theft
4. Have a 360 degree view of the property
5. Can withstand different types of weather



Watch out for common hazards

There are places at your carwash where the risks are higher because of the work being done—the vacuum, hand wash, or drying areas, for example. Take the following steps to avoid common hazards:

1. Never leave the vacuum area unattended when a vehicle is present.
2. All employees stationed in the drive-on area should be aware of every vehicle.
3. When vacuuming before the tunnel entrance, don't leave the car door open with the keys in the car before it is secured onto the conveyor in the staging area.
4. Leave the driver's side window down a few inches until you're ready to wash the vehicle to ensure the car door doesn't lock you out.
5. Do not leave the keys in the car while drying it off—put them somewhere accessible yet safe.

Also, if a customer needs to retrieve items from their vehicle, always have a carwash attendant assist them. Keep control of the keys; do not just hand them over and wait for the customer to return them to you.



Keep the area clear and controlled

It only takes a second of distraction for a vehicle to be stolen, and distracted employees are also more at risk for injury. Keep the area clear by taking the following steps:

1. Keep all non-employees, including customers, friends, and family members, out of the tunnel and conveyor area.
2. Ensure that only a designated driver is operating the customer's vehicle when driving it off from the tunnel.
3. Have the individuals who are allowed to drive these vehicles wear distinctive shirts or uniforms. Such consistency will help minimize the risk of a stolen vehicle.

If a vehicle needs to be moved for any reason while in the dry-off area, don't let just any carwash attendant do so. Set a procedure that only allows supervisors and drive-off personnel to move the vehicle.



Check in and check out

Ensure a safe check in and check out by taking the following steps:

1. Never release a vehicle without looking at the receipt and cross-referencing it with the receipt that was attached to the vehicle by your service writer.
2. If you use license plate numbers on your receipt, make sure that the characters match the license plate.
3. If no receipt, then send the customer back inside to get a duplicate receipt.

Follow this procedure for each vehicle, even if you know the customer. If a customer has left your property, then the vehicle must be moved to a safe parking spot. Remove the keys and place them in a safety box that's only accessible to designated individuals.



Review and reassess

Take the time to review your procedures by taking the following steps:

1. Study the transfer processes, such as how your employees hand over the keys to the customers.
2. Identify weaknesses in your operation that you can correct or improve.
3. Contact local law enforcement—many offer free assessment services to review your security measures and systems.

Reviewing and reassessing your procedures may help you identify better ways to conduct business.

About the Western Carwash Insurance Program

The Western Carwash Insurance Program has been the carwash industry's insurance partner of choice since 1994. Endorsed exclusively by the Western Carwash Association, the program is custom designed to cover the unique and wide-ranging risks facing carwashes throughout the west. Built by carwash operators for carwash operators, we provide a comprehensive barrier of coverage for all aspects of the business, whether self-service, automatic, express, flex, or full-service. Our depth of experience, strong carrier relationships, and VIP service enable us to provide the highest possible standard of insurance excellence at the most competitive rates in the market.

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