

Pet Theft

You've done it a thousand times-left your dog in your parked car or tethered to a post for a quick errand. This time when you return to retrieve her ...your dog is gone. You have become the victim of pet theft, which occurs with increasing frequency as the economy fluctuates and prospects of profiting from stealing a pet becomes more lucrative.

Common reasons pets are stolen:

- * The most common victims are purebred dogs. Their pedigree has street value that can fetch thousands of dollars with little effort from or expense to the dog napper. Stolen purebreds, especially toys, puppies, and designer breeds such as Labradoodles, are sold for half the asking price of a dog from a legitimate breeder.
- * Pets may be sold and shipped to a puppy mill (StopPyppyMills.com) to be used for breeding (this is why it is essential to have your pet spayed or neutered).
- * Thieves may steal animals and wait for a sizable reward to be posted, and then collect the money from unwittingly gracious guardians.
- * Stolen pets might be used as "bait dogs" to train fighting dogs.
- * Some people sell stolen and lost animals for research and veterinary institutions that use dogs and cats for testing and biomedical experimentation. These groups are often referred to as "Class B dealers". They are brokers who acquire their animals through flea markets, newspaper ads, and other savory sources

How to protect dogs:

- * Do open your car window to allow airflow, but not enough for a hand to reach in, open the door, and remove your dog.
- * Do not let your dog roam freely, unsupervised in your neighborhood.
- * Properly identify your dogs. Keep a collar and up-to-date ID tags and license on the collar, so he can quickly be reunited with you if he is lost. Give your pet additional security with a "Microchip".
- * Spay or neuter your animal. This will lower his desire to roam and medical laboratories often will not accept animals who have been altered. PAWS offers "low-cost spay/neuter surgeries" for qualified low-income individuals.
- * Do not use "Free to good homes ads" when looking for a new home for your pet. Do not place your pet in a new home without checking the new guardian's references.
(See more information on "PAWS/Finding a new home for your pet")
- * Never give animals away for free.
- * When returning a stray animal to his rightful guardian, request proof of ownership, including photos, vet records or licensing papers.

If you think your Pet is stolen:

- * Take action immediately! Call your local police/animal control and file a report, be proactive and persistent.
- * Contact your local shelter and post flyers on their community boards, checking back to make sure they remain posted. Leave flier with local pet stores, post offices, veterinary offices, breed rescue groups, and dog parks. Anywhere dog guardians are likely to congregate is a good place to network and get the word out about your missing companion. Read more about: "PAWS/finding your lost pet"
- * Monitor pets for sale or pet adoption ads in newspapers and popular online sites, checking carefully for descriptions that match your animal. This is where pet thieves are looking to profit from stealing your animal.
- * Walk around and call your pet's name in the area she was last seen, especially during evening hours when the whine noise of traffic has diminished.
- * Senior dogs get often disoriented, and hard of hearing. An effective way to recall is to train them to hear a whistle (high pitch).
- * If somebody claims they have found your lost animal, ask specific questions to ensure that the animal is yours, particularly if you are offering a reward.
- * Don't give up hope. Continue to post flyers, monitor websites, and check newspaper ads. Your pet may end up with caring people who might realize they are in possession of a stolen pet, and may return him to you.

More information on lost or stolen pets:

In Defense of Animals: 800.STOLEN PETS, e-mail: ida@idausa.org
Last Chance for Animals: 310.271.6096, e-mail: info@LCAnimal.org
USDA Missing Pets Network
ASPCA