



MEMORANDUM

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU

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To: Ald. Milele A. Coggs
From: Tea Norfolk, Legislative Fiscal Analyst – Lead
Date: May 20, 2021
Subject: Hyundai and Kia Thefts

This memo is in response to your request for information regarding thefts of Hyundai and Kia vehicles.

Milwaukee

Since the start of 2021, theft of Hyundai and Kia vehicles has steadily increased.

According to a February 3, 2021 article by Rebecca Klopff for TMJ4 News, “MPD: Hyundai and Kia vehicles too easy to steal, leading to spike in car thefts,” the Milwaukee Police Department stated that there has been an increase in vehicles thefts compared to the previous year. In 2020, there were 329 cars stolen in Milwaukee. In 2021, over the same time period, there were 831 – an increase of 153%. Of the stolen cars, more than 60% were Hyundais or a Kias.

According to an April 30, 2021 article by Hannah Jewell for FOX 6 News, “Kia, Hyundai car thefts spike in Milwaukee: ‘Epidemic,’” since January 1, there have been 2,949 vehicle thefts. Of those thefts, 973 were Kia and 947 were Hyundai vehicles. At the same time last year, there were 1,201 thefts, 34 of which were Kia and 58 were Hyundai.

According to a May 7, 2021 article by Elliot Hughes for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, “Worried about your Kia or Hyundai getting stolen? Milwaukee police are handing out steering wheel locks,” reports of vehicle thefts reached 3,100 – an increase of 171% compared to last year. Sergeant Efrain Cornejo stated that Hyundais and Kias are easier to steal than other cars because a key fob is not required to operate the vehicles. Additionally, installers of vehicle security systems have seen an increase in customers equipping their vehicles with alarms, especially Hyundais and Kias.

Thieves are targeting Kia vehicles made in 2011 or later and Hyundais made in 2015 or later.

According to a February 4, 2021 article in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel by James E. Causey, "Vehicle thefts up 152%, and may get worse," motor vehicle thefts have increased by 140% in 5 of the 7 police districts. The most significant increases are the following:

- District 1: 48 car thefts (140% increase)
- District 3: 94 car thefts (141% increase)
- District 4: 141 car thefts (152% increase)
- District 5: 147 car thefts (259% increase)
- District 7: 239 car thefts (219% increase)

The lowest percentage of car thefts was in District 2 with 74 stolen vehicles at only 21% higher.

An owner of a repair shop stated that Kias are being stolen at such an alarming rate that it is hard to find parts to fix them because there is a national backorder of up to 8 weeks in some cases for parts. Enterprise Rental Car has started hiding Kias because they get stolen off the lot.

According to AutoinsuranceEZ, an online resource for auto insurance, Milwaukee is 12th nationally on a list of metro areas with the highest vehicle theft rates.

A Kia Motors America representative stated he was not aware of a trend in thefts.

Any Milwaukee resident who can provide proof of ownership can contact any Milwaukee police district to receive a free steering wheel lock. The effort is made possible by a donation from the Milwaukee Police Foundation and O'Reilly Auto Parts. The wheel locks are reserved for Kia models from 2011 or later and Hyundai models from 2015 or later.

Other Cities

News stories from across the nation mostly refer to national insurance industry statistics as well as Milwaukee's statistics related to Kia and Hyundai thefts. However, Denver has reported a similar trend in Kias and Hyundais being targeted by car thieves. Denver police stated that 45 Kia vehicles were reported stolen in the month of November, 2019

– a dramatic increase from the previous average of 9 per month. In 2020, the number of Kias stolen rose steadily from 8 in January to 13 in February to 74 by November. In 2021, vehicle thefts increased by 145%. From January 1 to March 15, 2,345 vehicles were reported stolen. That number compares to 956 stolen the previous year in the same timeframe.

The Denver Police Department stated that the most frequently stolen vehicles are:

- Ford pickup trucks
- Chevy pickup trucks
- Honda
- Subaru
- Hyundai
- Kia

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