MARCH 2025

MCA TORONTO SAFETY

MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION OF TORONTO

UPDATE FROM THE MCA TORONTO SAFETY COMMITTEE

Vehicle Theft in the GTA:
Alarming Trends and Prevention Tips

On September 9, 2024, at 4:03 a.m., I had my new 2023 Jeep Gladiator stolen out of my driveway under camera surveillance. It took approximately six minutes for the two perpetrators to complete the theft.

Sadly, I was under a false sense of security believing that the Jeep was made with anti-theft components. I was very wrong and now I have learned just how easy it is to steal cars as well as how to prevent it.

Vehicle theft remains a significant problem in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), with an increasing number of cases reported in recent years. According to Toronto Police and insurance industry data, vehicle theft is a well-organized crime in the region, driven by high demand for certain makes and models. These vehicles are often shipped overseas or stripped for parts.

A report by Équité Association, a Canadian non-profit organization focused on vehicle theft, reveals that SUVs and pickup trucks dominate the list of vehicle thefts in Toronto. According to the latest statistics, the most frequently stolen vehicles include:

1. Lexus RX Series
2. Honda CR-V
3. Ford F-Series pick-up trucks
4. Toyota Highlander
5. Jeep Grand Cherokee

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OUR VISION IS:
To provide awareness, education and training, creating positive work environments with reduced risk.

OUR MISSION IS:
To improve the health and safety of all members of the Mechanical Contractors Association of Toronto

Ontario

what's new

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Ontario's *Working for Workers Five Act, 2024* Receives Royal Assent

On October 28, 2024, Ontario's *Working for Workers Five Act, 2024* (Bill 190) received Royal Assent. Bill 190 amends several statutes including the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.*

The following amendments to the ***Employment Standards Act, 2000 (ESA)*** are now in force:

- An employer is prohibited from requiring an employee to provide a certification from a qualified health practitioner as evidence of their entitlement to ESA sick leave.
- The maximum fine for an individual convicted of violating the ESA is increased from $50,000 to $100,000.

The following amendments will come into force at a later date:

- Every publicly advertised job posting must include a statement on whether the posting is for an existing vacancy. This requirement may be subject to prescribed exemptions.
- An employer who interviews an applicant for a publicly advertised job posting must provide the applicant with prescribed information within a prescribed time period.
- The "prescribed information" is not known as of yet.

The following amendments to the ***Occupational Health & Safety Act (OSHA)*** are now in force:

- The OSHA applies to telework performed in or around a private residence. Additional amendments exclude any office in a private residence from the definition of an "industrial establishment."
- The definition of workplace harassment and workplace sexual harassment is expanded to include harassment that occurs in a workplace "virtually through the use of information and communication technology."
- A constructor or employer is permitted to post the names and work locations of joint health and safety committee members in a readily accessible electronic format, rather than in the physical workplace.
- Joint health and safety committee meetings can now occur in locations other than the workplace (i.e. they can be held remotely).
- An employer may post its workplace health and safety policy in a readily accessible electronic format, rather than in the physical workplace.
- An employer may post a copy of the OSHA and any explanatory material in a readily accessible electronic

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WSIB to Return $2 Billion in Surplus Funds to Eligible Ontario Employers in 2025

The Ontario Government has announced that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) will return $2 billion in surplus funds to eligible employers in February 2025. This rebate applies to Schedule 1 businesses that meet specific safety and compliance criteria. To qualify for the rebate, businesses must:

- Have an active WSIB account as of November 1, 2024.
- Have paid WSIB premiums in 2023.
- Have no workplace fatalities in 2024 or 2025.
- Have no more than one work

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Vehicle Theft in the GTA:

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6. Dodge Ram pick-up trucks

These vehicles are targeted not only for their popularity but also for their advanced features, which thieves exploit to bypass security.

In 2023, over 10,000 vehicles were reported stolen in Toronto and, in 2024, there were 54 vehicle thefts per day across the GTA. This represents a significant increase compared to previous years, with vehicle theft rising by more than 50 per cent since 2020. Peel, Durham and York Regions are also experiencing similar spikes in thefts, contributing to a broader crime wave that affects the entire metropolitan area.

How are these vehicles stolen you may wonder? Advancements in technology have allowed thieves to employ various sophisticated methods to steal cars:

1. **Keyless Entry Hacks:** Many modern vehicles rely on keyless entry systems, which are vulnerable to "relay attacks." Thieves use electronic devices to amplify the signal from the owner's key fob and unlock the vehicle without physically possessing the key.
2. **OBD Port Access:** Some criminals target the On-Board Diagnostics (OBD) port, connecting devices that can reprogram a black key fob to start the vehicle. On some vehicles, they can access the vehicle computer via the front headlight or cut the tail gate and gain access. But, that is more of a rare occurrence.
3. **Physical Theft:** Despite the tech-savvy approaches, old-school methods such as breaking windows, hot-wiring, and towing vehicles remain prevalent.
4. **Smash and grab keys:** Crooks working in teams of two or three, smash your front door/window and grab the keys which are either hanging by the front door or in a dish in the hall. This happened to my neighbour and they were home in bed at the

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Ontario's *Working for Workers Five Act, 2024* Receives Royal Assent

format, rather than in the physical workplace. As was previously the case, this material must be posted in both English and the majority language of the workplace.

The following amendments will come into force on a date to be proclaimed in the future:

• A constructor or employer is required to ensure that any washroom facilities provided for worker use are maintained in a clean and sanitary condition. The constructor or employer is also required to maintain cleaning records, as prescribed. Additional regulations may modify or supplement the obligation to provide clean washroom facilities.

For more information on the *Working for Workers Five Act, 2024 (Bill 190)*, please click here.

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WSIB to Return $2 Billion in Surplus Funds to Eligible Ontario Employers in 2025

fatality attributed to their organization between 2020 and 2025.

• Have no more than one conviction under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA) or the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) since 2020.

• Not be affiliated with an ineligible business through common ownership.

The WSIB collected $3.4 billion in premiums from Schedule 1 employers in 2023. Based on the $2 billion rebate, the estimated return is approximately $0.59 per dollar paid in premiums. While the exact amounts may vary, following is a rough calculation:

• A company that paid $240,000 in WSIB premiums in 2023 could receive a rebate of approximately $141,176.

• A small construction busi-

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Vehicle Theft in the GTA: *Alarming Trends and Prevention Tips*

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time. In the case of another neighbour, thieves burst into his home and yelled to them to hand-over the car keys or they would be killed. According to Peel Police, the home invasion type of car theft is a growing problem, and have suggested that homeowners keep their keys in a Faraday pouch near the front door. This way, should thieves break into your home, you can be in a safe space and sound the alarm.

5. **Car Jacking:** This is more of an issue on high end SUVs, G wagons, etc. This method isn't the current trend. In a parking lot, two crooks demand your keys and take-off in your vehicle. The only solution to this is to have an app on your phone that can kill the ignition at a safe distance.

What happens to stolen vehicles? Once stolen, vehicles typically follow one of these paths:

1. **Exportation Overseas:** Many high-end SUVs and trucks are shipped abroad, often to countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Organized crime rings operate these sophisticated networks, with vehicles leaving through Montreal or Halifax ports.

2. **Chop Shops:** Some stolen vehicles end-up in local chop shops, where they are dismantled, and the parts are sold on the black market. These parts – especially catalytic converters, engines, and electronics – are valuable and can be sold quickly.

3. **Cloning:** Thieves may also use stolen vehicles for "VIN cloning," where thieves give the stolen car a fake identity by changing its Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and selling it to unsuspecting buyers.

Although vehicle theft is on the rise, there are several ways drivers can protect their cars from being targeted. Keep in mind that thieves don't want to spend hours stealing a car. They want to be inside the vehicle and gone in less than two minutes. Slowing them down is the best deterrent.

1. **Use a steering wheel lock:** A visible steering wheel lock can act as a deterrent, making it harder for thieves to drive off with the vehicle. However, the "Club" can be easy to remove, by either drilling the lock (about 15 seconds) or by cutting the steering wheel with bolt or zip cutters. Stop

Steering wheel lock.

Lock makes the best system I have seen. This product has been tested by professionals who determined it had to be cut off with a zip cutter wheel, and could take about five minutes to remove while making a great deal of noise and creating sparks.

2. **Use a brake lock:** These devices go on the brake pedal and lock it in the "up" position so you can't depress it to engage the starter. If the car is started, braking will likely be a problem. I use one on my wife's car. It takes some time to get on and off, but the pros don't like it because it's difficult to remove and may set the car on fire in the process. However, I would suggest that you do not purchase the one that connects to the steering wheel because they are easy to cut, drill and remove.

Brake lock device.

3. **Cover your VIN:** Crooks need the VIN number (there are apps for that) to gain security information on your vehicle. They can either scan it and go to the dark web to obtain this information, or use an app. VIN numbers are located on the left side, lower corner

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Re-Designed Construction App Introduced

IHSA's completely re-designed Construction Safety web app helps you better understand your OHSA obligations by summarizing health and safety requirements for more than 50 topics. Available in English and French, the app can be accessed on any Safari or Chrome web browser on your desktop computer – or add it to the home screen of your smartphone or tablet.

For more information, click here.

A Reminder to Keep Your Promise

IHSA is proud to be a partner in creating safer and healthier Ontario workplaces. Recently, the association rolled out a new campaign with an important message for workers and employers in the industries IHSA serves: Keep your promise to return home healthy and safe to those who count on you at the end of each workday. There are three videos now available to remind you to keep your promise. WATCH THEM NOW.

Leading by Example at Your Workplace

How management can shape a proactive health and safety culture

Leading by example is a widely recognized management strategy, particularly in construction, where it significantly influences how workers engage with health and safety on the jobsite.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) assigns specific responsibilities to all workplace parties involved in a construction project. These duties collectively support the internal responsibility system (IRS), fostering a safe and healthy work environment. Managers and supervisors, often acting as representatives of the employer, play a crucial role in safeguarding workers. They also shape a culture of safety by promoting the IRS and encouraging all workplace parties to prioritize safe work practices and overall well-being.

"Management is responsible for everything," says Maren Gamble, IHSA's Manager of Organizational Excellence. "That responsibility goes beyond legal obligations. Management must both talk the talk and walk the walk."

SHAPING THE SAFETY CULTURE

Managers, especially those in senior positions, serve as health and safety

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ness with 50 employees might receive around $46,000.

• A company paying an average $1.30 per $100 in payroll could expect a rebate of around $8,775 for a 10-person business.

The rebate will be applied as a credit to WSIB accounts rather than a direct cash payout. While this still reduces costs for businesses, it may not have the immediate impact of a direct refund.

While many businesses welcome the rebate, some argue that lower WSIB premium rates would have been a better approach. The rebate suggests that businesses have overpaid in past years, but it still represents a significant financial return.

Eligible Ontario employers should be prepared to receive their WSIB surplus rebate as a credit in February 2025. Businesses should check their WSIB account status and ensure compliance with eligibility requirements to maximize their return.

Stay informed and monitor WSIB communications for the exact rebate distribution date.

If you think your business is eligible for a surplus rebate, but haven't received a credit on your account by **March 13, 2025**, please email employeraccounts@wsib.on.ca.

IHSA Announces New eLearning Mental Health Course

The Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA) is excited to introduce a new eLearning mental health course, *Opening the Door to Support*, designed to equip supervisors, managers, and leaders with essential skills and tools to support mental health in the workplace. This course is currently offered at no charge, is accessible to a broad audience, including individuals in various roles, and delivers a self-paced learning experience.

IHSA worked collaboratively with the Mental Health Innovations (MHI) and engaged key stakeholders in the design and development of this on-demand eLearning. *Opening the Door to Support* stands out with its interactive, story-based approach that immerses learners in real-life scenarios from the trades.

Participants will work through six modules, covering topics such as:

- Breaking down stigma.
- Looking after yourself.
- Recognizing signs of mental distress.
- Leading by example and shifting the culture.
- Communicating supportively.
- Supporting others.

Each module includes customized and interactive elements, multiple learning activities to increase knowledge retention, and job aids for future reference. This comprehensive course will equip participants to maintain a supportive work environment and make a positive impact on mental health.

To learn more about *Opening the Door to Support*, visit the course website.

WORKPLACE HAZARDS

IHSA Partners with Mental Health Commission of Canada to Launch Training for the Trades

The Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA) is partnering with Opening Minds, a division of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) to pilot a new training program designed to reduce stigma surrounding mental illness in trade-sector workplaces.

The courses have been adapted for trades sectors from *Opening Minds' The Working Mind*, an evidence-based learning program developed to help Ontario workplaces better understand mental illness and foster psychologically healthy and safe working environments.

"*The Working Mind for the Trades* was customized specifically for trades workers based on consultation with the construction, transportation, and electrical utilities industries," says Michelle Roberts, Vice President of Stakeholder and Public Relations at IHSA. "We know that mental health is a growing concern in high-risk workplaces – we want this program to ensure all workplace parties can recognize mental health hazards, support workers who are experiencing mental health concerns, foster mental wellness for themselves and their peers, and understand the mental health continuum."

These courses are suitable for all workers in the sectors served by IHSA, as well as workplace leadership, including supervisors, crew leaders, union stewards or managers.

Courses will be led by a facilitator and delivered live via Zoom, using discussions, breakout activities, videos, and polls. Starting in 2025, delivery will be expanded to include in-person classroom sessions. After completing the program, participants will be able to:

- Understand mental health and mental illness
- Identify and reduce stigma, discrimination, or negative attitudes toward people with mental health problems.
- Support their colleagues and other workplace parties.
- Recognize mental stressors and build resilience.

Opening Minds has facilitated nearly 180,000 mental health courses with more than one million participants, and has had success helping workplaces in various industries across Canada adapt and implement The Working Mind and invest in their workforce's mental wellbeing. IHSA is thrilled to partner with MHCC to deliver this programming for tradespeople, who themselves face unique mental stressors due to the demanding and stressful nature of their work.

For more information on *The Working Mind for the Trades*, please click here.

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Leading by Example at Your Workplace

role models on the jobsite. "They are on stage 100 per cent of the time," Gamble explains. "Employees are always observing senior management's actions."

For instance, a senior manager entering a site without the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) sends a message that safety is not a priority. In contrast, a manager who consistently wears the correct PPE demonstrates a commitment to workplace safety.

Employees look to their managers for behavioral cues, much like they do for job instructions. "If health and safety practices are valued by management, workers are more likely to adopt and repeat them," Gamble adds.

Managers can lead by example in several ways:

- **Be a source of knowledge:** Understand and communicate company health and safety policies beyond legislative requirements.
- **Dress appropriately:** Always wear required PPE and ensure it is in good condition.
- **Address hazards proactively:** Take action upon spotting potential hazards rather than ignoring them.

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all vehicles. A solid black Winner's gift card works really well to obscure the VIN and these are free.

4. **Invest in a Vehicle Tracking System:** GPS trackers can help authorities recover stolen vehicles faster. It's suggested that you look for systems that integrate with your smartphone for real-time tracking. However, thieves typically look for these and simply disconnect the battery rendering them useless. TAG is the company that most insurance companies insist you have if you own a Jeep, Ram or F150. These have a 99.8 per cent recovery rate and use independently hidden transponders with their own power supply that lasts nine years. My insurance company paid $100 of the cost of installation and provided a $500/per year premium reduction. Other insurance companies may pay for the entire installation.

5. **Park in well-lit, secure areas:** Thieves prefer poorly lit or isolated areas. Parking in a secure, well-lit location or in a garage can significantly reduce the risk of theft. I prefer using motion activated flood lights with a wi-fi security camera (battery, solar or hard wired). When parking your car, look around. If people are approaching you (typically in pairs), wait before exiting or moving spots.

6. **Install a dash camera:** Some dash cams have motion detection features that activate when they sense movement near the car and record potential theft attempts. Some will send you an alert to your cell phone.

7. **Faraday pouches for key fobs:** Using a Faraday pouch to block the signal from your key fob can prevent relay attacks. If you leave your keys by the front door without such a pouch, thieves can scan that signal and relay it to the vehicle, unlock the doors and start the engine.

8. **Disable the OBD Port:** Installing a lock or disabler on the OBD port can stop thieves from accessing your vehicle's computer. Amazon has very inexpensive OBD2 port locks. These use a cover and a security screw, which is not easy to remove without a special tool. However, knowing how advanced thieves are today, they may have such a tool to remove it. What I did was remove the OBD2 port and install a fake one. It powers up so thieves think the vehicles computer is being accessed, but no signal is sent – making thieves believe their scanner is not working.

Wheel boot.

9. **Enable factory security features:** Always enable any factory-installed alarms or immobilizer systems in your vehicle. Crooks will open the hood and cut the horn out, so you may want to lock the hood. I installed a secondary alarm that is remotely armed, well-hidden and shock activated.

10. **Kill switch:** This is a very good option for Jeep or Ram owners. As the name says, if the switch is not on, the starter will not function. Dealerships offer their own twist on this, and there are commercial versions. Many DIY'ers also have their own ideas, but I am not a fan of cutting into factory wiring. One option is to simply replace the start relay with a kill switch, and put a switch somewhere inside the cabin that is hard to find. I have done this. No factory wiring issues, it can be removed in 10 seconds and it's easy to install.

11. **Wheel boots:** Anyone who has seen the show Parking Wars knows what wheel boots are. It is basically a cover over the wheels bolts and locks on a wheel making the vehicle difficult to drive off or be towed away. They are easy to remove, so it's suggested that users purchase two and check the ratings on the brand chosen. I bought two "Club" brand wheel clamps.

By taking a few extra precautions and staying aware of the growing trends in vehicle theft, GTA drivers can better protect themselves and their vehicle from falling victim to this costly crime.

– Ian Bergeron, B. Tech., CET, CRSP, Paralegal, Sprint Mechanical Inc.

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Leading by Example at Your Workplace

• **Maintain open communication:** Discuss worker concerns and move safety conversations forward. An engaged workforce is more likely to raise concerns before incidents occur.

Gamble also emphasizes the importance of visibility in health and safety efforts. "At some organizations, management conducts their own field inspections, ensuring that safety initiatives are not just policies on paper but lived practices," she says.

MANAGING CHANGE ON THE JOBSITE

Implementing health and safety changes can be challenging, as workers may resist adjustments to their routines. "We're asking employees to rethink processes they could previously do without much thought," Gamble explains.

To manage change effectively:

• **Acknowledge the difficulty of change:** Explain the necessity of new procedures and support workers through transitions.

• **Identify potential concerns:** Anticipate questions and address them early.

• **Assess risks:** Evaluate new psychological and physical hazards introduced by changes.

• **Prioritize adjustments:** Introduce modifications gradually to ease the transition.

INVESTING IN HEALTH AND SAFETY

A proactive health and safety culture benefits overall operations. "When health and safety discussions happen naturally, workers start looking out for one another," says Gamble. Engaged workers are not only safer but also more efficient and innovative.

While no leader is perfect, Gamble encourages continuous learning. "Health and safety culture is evolving, and we are all learning together," she says.

To read the full article, please click here.