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American Kennel Club News Article

American Kennel Club Cautions Owners: Pet Theft on the Rise

Date of Article: April 08, 2008

-- Dog Owners and Breeders Advised to Keep Dogs Safe at Home and on the Road --

The American Kennel Club® is warning pet owners and breeders about an alarming rise in dog thefts in recent months. From parking lots to pet stores and even backyards, more dogs are disappearing. In the first three months of 2008, the AKC has tracked more than 30 thefts from news and customer reports, versus only ten for all twelve months of 2007.

Media reports have chronicled the escalation of these "dog-nappings" from all around the country. Incidents have included armed robbers entering a breeder's home, tiny puppies being stuffed into purses at pet stores and most recently, purebred pets being snatched from cars in parking lots and even shelters.

"The value of pets in people's lives has been on the rise for a long time and now we are seeing thieves trying to capitalize on this. Whether they seek to resell the dog, collect a ransom or breed the dogs and sell their offspring, thieves seem to be attuned to the increased financial and emotional value pets have in our lives," said AKC spokesperson Lisa Peterson. "Losing a treasured family pet is devastating to the owner."

"Criminals look for weaknesses and exploit them. They know pets can't protect themselves, so that means owners need to be alert," said Lt. John Kerwick, a law enforcement K-9 handler and the President of the U.S. Police Canine Association, Region 7. "Be wary of anyone who approaches you and asks too many questions about your dog or where you live. This is a red flag that they may be out to snatch your pet."

Peterson added that "These 'dog-nappers' are misguided and naïve. They're stealing living beings, not jewelry that can be pawned. Plus, it's unlikely that they can sell the dogs for high prices without proper registration papers, and these inept criminals are not realistically going to collect a ransom. Caring for a dog -- and especially breeding -- is a time consuming endeavor that requires a lot of knowledge. Thieves will find themselves with a frightened and confused animal that needs a lot of care."

The AKC offers the following advice to prevent your "best friend" from being a target of a crime:

At Home

- **Don't let your dog off-leash** — Keeping your dog close to you reduces the likelihood it will wander off and catch the attention of thieves. A Saint Bernard that had wandered away from his owner in Nebraska was snatched up right off the road.
- **Don't leave your dog unattended in your yard** — Dogs left outdoors when no one is home for long periods of time can be potential targets, especially if you live in a rural area and the fenced-in yard or dog runs are visible from the street.
- **Keep purchase price to yourself** — If strangers approach you to admire your dog during walks, don't answer questions about how much the dog cost or give details about where you live.
- **Breeders need to be aware of home visits by potential puppy buyers** — Criminals posing as would be "puppy buyers" have visited breeder homes to snatch dogs, while other homes have been burglarized when the owner was away. From Yorkies in Los Angeles to Bulldogs in Connecticut, thieves have targeted young puppies of these highly coveted breeds.

On the Road

- **Never leave your dog in an unattended car, even if it's locked** — Even if you are gone for only a moment, an unlocked car is an invitation for trouble. Also leaving expensive items in the car such as a GPS unit or laptop will only invite thieves to break and possibly allow the dog to escape.
- **Don't tie your dog outside a store** — This popular practice among city dwelling dog owners can be a recipe for disaster. Reports have surfaced of such thefts in Manhattan. If you need to go shopping, patronize only dog-friendly retailers or leave the dog at home.
- **Be vigilant when entering or leaving establishments or venues catering to dogs such as grooming salons, veterinarians, doggie day care or hotels** — Be aware of your surroundings, such as slow moving

vehicles, or people watching you and your dog. Carry pepper spray as a precaution and, if possible, don't walk alone late at night or stay in a well lit area.

Recovery

- **Protect your dog with microchip identification** — Collars and tags can be removed so make sure you have permanent ID with a microchip. Keep contact information current with your recovery service provider. Several pets have been recovered because of alert people scanning and discovering microchips. For more information and to enroll your pet in a 24 hour recovery service visit www.akccar.org.
- **If you suspect your dog has been stolen** — Immediately call the police / animal control in the area your pet was last seen.
- **Have fliers with a recent photo ready to go if your dog goes missing** — Keep a photo of your dog in your wallet or on an easily accessible web account so that you can distribute immediately if your pet goes missing.



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