

HIJACKING AWARENESS GUIDE

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1. Introduction

This document was designed with the following in mind:

- To educate the public
- To assist the public in recognising what a suspicious vehicle and person may look like
- To emphasise the seriousness of hijackings on the person reading this awareness guide.

Hijacking is not a new or unique problem to South Africa.

The first hijacking was recorded in 1984.

Between January and August 1996, there were 8 740 hijackings in South Africa, of which 5 251 were in Gauteng.

Hijacking is also not only a problem just associated with industrial areas; e.g. Wadeville in Germiston, but rather a problem associated with the availability of a certain of vehicle.

In 90% of these cases the hijackers were armed, although only 1% of attacks involved a fatal shooting. This means that the better prepared a potential victim is, the greater probability of the person surviving the attack with limited physical injury.

2. How to Avoid a Hijack Situation

2.1 Take Precautions:

- Be familiar with your environment.
- Get to know who belongs in the vicinity of your home or workplace, and who does not.
- Keep your eyes open for anything out of the ordinary.
- Lock all doors and close windows before driving off.
- Try to vary your route to work, the gym – all places you travel to regularly.
- Hijackers are professionals too; they plan their attacks carefully.
- Ensure all your mirrors are adjusted to give you an optimal all-round view of your surroundings.
- Try to stop about 5m behind the car in front of you at a stop sign or traffic light – it makes for an easy getaway if trouble arises.

2.2 Don't Be Fooled By:

- False appeals for help.
- "Accidents" such as having you car rammed from behind.
- Someone trying to get help from a stationary car.
- your electric gates being jammed

2.3 Know Your Environment :

- If approached by a stranger while in your car, drive off if possible and/or use your hooter to attract attention.

- Be constantly on the lookout for suspicious looking characters or vehicles and do not hesitate to report them to the Police.
- Always be on the alert for potential danger, and be on the lookout for possible escape routes and safe refuge along the way.
- If your suspicions are aroused by any person or vehicle in a high-risk area, treat it as hostile and take appropriate action (i.e. Ignore a red robot if it is safe to drive through; turn off and speed away from the perceived danger zone) and call for assistance where necessary.
- Always have your identity document and driver's license on your person; and a pen and notepad ready to make necessary notes.
- If possible, avoid driving in the dark. Hijackers may stage a minor accident; e.g. If your car is bumped from behind and you do not feel comfortable with the individual/s involved in the situation, drive to the nearest Police Station for help.
- Never open your vehicle window or door for any stranger. If a suspicious person is near your unoccupied car, do not approach the vehicle. Keep walking to the nearest public area and ask for assistance.

3. How to reduce the risk

While there is no guarantee what action will prevent hijacking, practising the following common sense techniques can reduce the risk:

3.1 When Entering Your Vehicle and While Driving:

- Have your key ready, but not visible.
- Inspect the outside and inside of the vehicle before unlocking.
- Know your destination and directions to it, and be alert should you get lost.
- Always drive with your windows and doors locked and/or closed.
- Make a mental note of any Police Stations in the vicinity while driving.
- When dropping a passenger off, make sure that they are safely in their own vehicles before departing.
- Avoid driving through high crime or unfamiliar areas.
- Avoid driving late at night at/or the early hours of the morning when the roads are quiet.
- Drive in the centre lane away from pedestrians where possible.
- If possible, never drive alone.
- NEVER, EVER pick up hitchhikers.
- Never follow routine routes when driving; change on a regular basis.
- Do not leave windows open more than 5cm.

3.2 When Parking Your Vehicle:

- Check rear-view mirror to ensure that you are not being followed.
- When returning home after dark, ensure that there is an outside light on, or have someone meet you at the door.

- When exiting your vehicle, be cautious and aware of surrounding obstructions and shrubbery that may be concealing a hijacker.
- Never sit in your parked car without being conscious of your surroundings. Sleeping in a stationary vehicle is particularly dangerous.
- When approaching your driveway, be on the lookout for suspicious vehicles/persons.

4. What is a suspicious vehicle/person?

A suspicious vehicle/person is a vehicle/person that acts in a manner which may seem to be unusual or strange.

EXAMPLES:

4.1 Vehicles

You are driving from your home; a new vehicle follows you for thirty minutes staying in the same lane as you, taking the same turn-offs as you.

If this vehicle has an old registration number e.g. HSG 090 T, the registration number is false, as all new cars should now have new Gauteng numbers plates.

The most important fact to remember while driving a motor vehicle is to be alert at all times. This is why the K53 driving method of driving is beneficial since the method concentrates a lot on the regular use of rear view mirrors.

4.2 Persons

A suspicious person can be any person that you feel acts in a strange manner. The problem with suspicious persons is that there are no distinguishing features. Hijackers come in any form or shape. Colour, race, sex or age are not distinguishing features.

The best way to identify a suspicious person is to see all unknown persons as being suspicious.

5. Questions and Answers

5.1 WHEN AM I THE MOST VULNERABLE?

At traffic lights	7%
At a stop street or yield sign	6%
At other intersections	1%
In front of private residences	51%
At business premises	5%
At shops, post offices, telephone booths, etc	3%
At filling stations	1%
Victims sitting in parked cars	10%
Victims forced off road by decoys	4%
Victims parking, i.e. Either starting cars or leaving/approaching parked cars	2%
Victims stationary and working at the roadside, i.e. repairing telephone cables	2%

While loading and offloading goods	2%
By hitch-hikers	1%
While taxis are loading/offloading passengers	4%
Unknown	1%

5.2 WHO ARE THESE HIJACKERS ?

To date, the overwhelming proportion of all the hijackers have been men, and occasionally women. operating in groups of four or five, sometimes more. The hijackers tend to be very young, in their teens and early twenties, although some victims report the presence of a ‘team leader’ who seemed older. Women are being used to lull potential victims into a false sense of security, since most of us feel less threatened in the presence of a woman as opposed to a man.

These people are sometimes well dressed, but not always. They may wear a jacket or jersey under which they may conceal weapons, mostly handguns and knives, but occasionally AK47 assault rifles.

The hijackers operate from motorcars, although they have been known to attack on foot. The cars they use vary, but are normally high performance vehicles, sometimes with tinted windows. Their driving habits are immediately suspicious. Before an attack they may cruise slowly around a particular area (often for days before the attack) without any apparent sense of purpose or specific direction. They may also simply sit in the car parked off the road or in a parking garage. Immediately after an attack, their driving patterns change dramatically. They will speed off, driving perhaps nervously and recklessly, but often with an air of bravado as if enjoying or flaunting publicly their total disregard for the law and the innocent person they have just attacked. They might ignore red traffic lights, jump stop streets and weave in and out through traffic, especially on motorways. *This renders them highly visible to the public and this is where private citizens can play a vital role in assisting these people’s arrest.*

The police are urging citizens to make use of the 10111 telephone number if they find themselves in a hijack situation. It is also open to anyone who sees a suspicious looking vehicle either following them or loitering around the neighbourhood.

5.3 ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HIJACKING ?

- The **“Freight”** hijacking, in which a commercial vehicle is hijacked, is not only to secure the vehicle, but also its cargo, which can be of substantial value. Frequently, the cargo is of more interest to the hijacker than the truck.
- The **“Transport”** hijacking, in which the vehicle is taken for the express purpose of using as transport during other crimes such as drug trafficking, burglaries, bank robberies and gun running. The vehicles are probably later cannibalised for spare parts or simply dumped.
- The **“Showmanship”** hijacking, in which a gang operates out of egotistical bravado, acting on the “this is a cool thing to be doing” rationale. Peer group pressure is very high and individuals may be coerced into more dangerous and daredevil approaches, being labelled as a ‘sissy’ if they do not. Thus intimidation, violence and vandalism is associated with the crime.
- The **“Operational”** hijacking, in which a group formally work together in a more structured way. They usually have experience in car theft and have established contact within the motorcar underworld who will receive and pay cash for stolen vehicles or spare parts. They also often have information with regards to the international black market, e.g. The movement of stolen cars into South Africa’s neighbouring states.
- The **“Syndicate”** hijacking, which is the most organised of all and often has international connections. A network of hijacking groups is established with the overall co-ordinator syndicating out work so that he remains out of view in exactly the same way as the “drug barons” use pushers. This makes identifying and arresting the ultimate boss very difficult.

Additionally, a syndicate is often backed by a lot of money, especially if there are international links and makes full use of any potential to bribe the authorities in order to protect their operations.

5.4 WHAT PREVENTATIVE MEASURES CAN I TAKE REGARDING MY PROPERTY?

- Ensure that anyone leaving your property can get into their car, start it, lock the doors and be fully prepared to drive off before the gates are opened. Consciously think about this every time someone leaves your premises.
- If possible, ensure that anyone leaving your premises can do so without having to reverse into the road. Reversing forces one to concentrate on the driving and not what lies outside the gate. It also greatly reduces visibility.
- If your visitors have to park in the street, escort them out on foot and check that the road is clear for them. If you have dogs, take them with you, especially after dark.
- Ensure that your *gate and driveway are well lit after dark*. Replace fused light bulbs immediately.
- Ensure that the number of your house is clearly visible at all times, night or day.
- Install electrically operated gates – consider these now a necessity rather than a luxury.
- If you have electric gates and a buzzer system, ensure that visitors can reach the buzzer without having to get out of their cars.
- At the home, when someone rings the bell and you have established that the person can enter your property, do not leave them stationary waiting outside for longer than is absolutely necessary.
- Either do not leave your property or hesitate to drive away from it if you spot a suspicious looking person or car in your immediate vicinity
- Be particularly alert if you live in a cul de sac, given their single point of entry and exit. More and more residents are reverting to closing off cul de sacs and employing a guard at the entrance. However, when considering this, do not forget to liaise with the City Council.
- When driving, avoid wearing flashy jewellery, heavy gold chains, large dangling earrings, gold watches, or anything that can be easily seen from a distance by a casual passer-by.
- Never leave any important documents in your car, i.e. cheque books, bank statements, invoices, telephone accounts, credit cards, keys, remote controls or personal post, anything that may provide personal details, either while stationary or driving.
- Vehicle tracking: the only solution to vehicle related crimes is to have tracking systems installed.

5.5 HOW SHOULD I RESPOND IN THE EVENT OF BEING HIJACKED?

- No matter how outraged you may feel at the time, your prime objective must be to *look after your personal safety and that of your passengers*. The preservation of human life must take precedence over material assets.
- *Do nothing that is going to alarm the hijackers. Never initiate any movement yourself. This may give the hijacker the impression that you are reaching for a gun or panic button. Remember – the hijackers will be as nervous, if not more so, than you. Do not motion with your hands. Rather tell the hijackers where they can find the items. Keep your hands clearly visible and as still as possible, ideally at chest level. Do not raise them above your head as the hijackers may interpret this as you trying to attract the attention of a third party.*
- *Answer any Questions truthfully* especially with regard to firearms. If the hijacker finds out or suspects that you have lied to him, he is more likely to turn violent and unleash his frustrations on you physically.

- Even in your shocked and terrified state, try to listen to and understand exactly what the hijackers want from you.
- Try to concentrate on the possibility of identifying your attackers at a later stage. But remember – this does not mean staring at your attackers, making it obvious that you are looking for a means of identifying them. Stare openly at them and they will be less willing to release you, as they will think that you have incriminating evidence against them.
- If they kidnap you – co-operate with them fully. If you have a baby sleeping in the back seat which they may not have noticed, tell the attackers. Tell them that driving away with your child is only going to make things more difficult for them. Ask them if they can fetch your child. Do not move towards the car without their explicit directive. Tell them that a baby means them no harm and is no threat. Do the same if you have a pet in the car. Do not push the issue to the point where your life may be threatened at the expense of a pet.