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11- and 12-year-olds among those suspected in rash of Madison car thefts

CHRIS RICKERT crickert@madison.com Jan 26, 2018



STATE JOURNAL ARCHIVES

One 11-year-old and four 12-year-olds are among 59 people ages 17 and younger suspected of stealing vehicles in Madison in the last half of 2017, police say.

Youth make up more than half of the people police have been able to identify in connection with 275 reported thefts in that period.

Madison and Fitchburg have seen a big jump in vehicle thefts in recent months, often by teens. On Thursday, Fitchburg said it saw 67 car thefts in 2017, almost triple the 24 the city saw the year before. The department has referred 19 juveniles with an average age of 14.8 to the Dane County District Attorney's Office on vehicle theft charges.

The 275 reported thefts in Madison in the last half of 2017 is more than the total reported in all of 2015, or 262. There were 381 vehicle thefts in Madison in 2016, the last year for which annual data are available.

Madison police spokesman David Dexheimer said that as of Tuesday, 48 vehicles had been reported stolen this month, from all over the city.

“This many stolen cars in my career is unheard of,” he said.

Crimes of opportunity

Fitchburg and Madison authorities say the vast majority of thefts have been crimes of opportunity in which keys are left in vehicles, some of which have been left running to warm up during recent cold stretches.

Michael Johnson, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, said police officials from both cities laid out the recent uptick in thefts at a meeting with local leaders of color on Wednesday.

Johnson said Thursday that a group of children at Jefferson Middle School on Madison’s West Side decided to start stealing cars, and the idea spread from there.

He said he’s been working with other community leaders to provide social services and other interventions to the suspected thieves and their parents.

MORE INFORMATION



Madison, Fitchburg police report uptick in car thefts, including by teens

- Woman dragged hanging on car door trying to retrieve stolen wallet, Madison police say
- Girl, 14, arrested for auto theft; stolen BMW crashed into squad car, Middleton police say

Chris Rickert | Wisconsin State Journal

Chris Rickert is the urban affairs reporter and SOS columnist for the Wisconsin State Journal.