

Peel Police hold summit addressing rising cases of auto theft

Summit held in collaboration with a joint management team

By **ZACHARY ROMAN**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Peel Regional Police, along with police services from across Ontario, recently met to discuss a rising issue in the Province: auto theft.

On March 20, in collaboration with a joint management team, the Peel Regional Police held the 2024 Auto Theft Summit.

The joint management team consisted of the Durham Regional Police Service, Halton Regional Police Service, Hamilton Police Service, Niagara Regional Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police, Toronto Police Service, York Regional Police, Criminal Intelligence Service of Ontario, and Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police.

The summit was held to give law enforcement agencies, government officials, auto manufacturers, the insurance industry, and advocates a chance to come together and tackle the issue of auto theft and address vulnerabilities that are contributing to it.

The summit was the second to be held; a first was held in 2023.

Peel Regional Police Chief Nishan Duraipah said organized auto theft has become an epidemic in many Ontario jurisdictions.

‘It has escalated into a complex national issue, impacting the safety and well-being of our communities,’ he said. ‘While we continue to dedicate significant policing resources and see positive results in the work, we also need solutions from government, [and the] automotive and insurance (industries), to vulnerabilities that are contributing to auto theft.’

According to data from the Peel Regional Police, Ontario Provincial Police, Toronto Police service, York Regional Police, Durham Regional Police, Hamilton Regional Police, Niagara Regional Police, and Ottawa Police Services, there has been a 116 per cent increase in stolen vehicles between 2019 and 2023.

During that time, 15,757 stolen vehicles, valued at \$545 million, were recovered.

Peel Regional Police said in 2023 alone 7,400 vehicles were stolen in the Region of Peel. This equals over 600 vehicles stolen per month, around 20 per day.

In the last two years in Peel, there's been 185 carjackings. One of them resulted in a homicide.

Police services in Ontario have combined to establish a Provincial Car Jacking Task Force to address the rising number of violent auto theft incidents.

According to Peel Regional Police, the task force has to date laid over 730 criminal charges and recovered more than 150 stolen vehicles. This has also resulted in the seizure of numerous firearms.

Provincially-led operations from the Ontario Provincial Police and Criminal Intelligence Service of Ontario have, to date, resulted in over 1,400 criminal charges and the recovery of over 900 stolen vehicles.

York Regional Police Chief Jim MacSween, President of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, said Ontario's police services

are working together with governments, community groups, and corporate partners to find effective ways to stop auto theft.

?Organized auto theft is among the top three revenue generators for criminal organizations. It represents a growing and serious threat to public safety and puts police officers at risk as individuals committing these crimes are using increasingly dangerous ways to evade capture and eventual arrest,? said MacSween.

At the summit, calls were made to strengthen enforcement at ports of entry, as well as for targeted legislation and sanctions to curb organized crime.