

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF HEAVY GOODS VEHICLE THEFT

Police Research Group - Crime Detection and Prevention Series: Paper 66

by Rick Brown

Summary

Until recently, the extent of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) theft was unknown. This research set out to estimate the number of HGVs stolen in 1994 and to identify the circumstances in which they were taken. Information was collected in two stages. First, Police National Computer records were analysed in order to estimate the number of HGV thefts. This was followed by a postal survey of 1,350 HGV theft victims, of whom 700 (52%) responded.

The research found that in 1994, 3,047 HGVs were stolen in Great Britain. Of these, 360 were subsequently recovered.

Types of vehicle stolen

Tipper lorries were the most frequently stolen type of HGV, accounting for 30% of thefts. Four types of HGV (tipper, drop-side, flat-bed and goods) accounted for almost 80% of all thefts. However, livestock carriers had the highest risk of being stolen, relative to their numbers on the road. Where the make of lorry was concerned, 80% of thefts were concentrated on four manufacturers (Iveco Ford, Bedford, Leyland DAF and Mercedes). In terms of the relative risk of theft, Bedfords were most likely to be stolen.

Location of theft

The South East had the highest number of thefts, followed by Yorkshire and Humberside and the North West. By contrast, Scotland and Wales had the lowest incidence of theft, accounting for 4.4% of thefts. Those parked on industrial estates accounted for over half of the HGVs stolen, whilst rural locations and residential areas each accounted for about a fifth of thefts. Over half of thefts occurred from a company's own depot, whilst 11% of vehicles were taken from factory / warehouse parking areas.

Time of theft

HGVs were most likely to be found stolen on a Monday. This was probably due to the fact that many weekend thefts will not be discovered until the Monday morning. Indeed, almost a third of HGVs appear to be stolen over the weekend. Over three quarters of all stolen HGVs were found to have been stolen in the morning, suggesting that the hours of darkness present a particularly high risk.

Victims of theft

The majority of victims of HGV theft were smaller sized companies. Organisations employing ten staff or less accounted for half of all thefts. The construction industry seems to have been most affected (with 31% of thefts) followed by distribution / haulage.

In terms of the insured value of the vehicle (usually considerably less than the actual/replacement value), the average loss suffered was £11,238. Multiplied across the 2,687 unrecovered vehicles, this gives a total insured value of over £30 million.

Vehicle Security

Over three quarters of the stolen vehicles had steering column locks. Generally speaking, however, stolen HGVs had minimal security protection.

Where the security of parking location was concerned, almost a third of vehicles had been parked in a location with no security present, whilst half were stolen from locations with locked gates and/or fencing.

Once HGV owners had been the victim of a theft over 80% took measures to prevent being a victim again through improving the security of their vehicles/premises.

Points for action

On the basis of the current research, it is possible to make a range of suggestions which could help manufacturers, owners and drivers of HGVs take action to reduce the extent of this problem.

Vehicle manufacturers

- **Improving security:** For the long term benefit of the industry, **all** manufacturers should consider installing effective security on **all new HGVs** as standard.
- **Influencing the components market:** Manufacturers should address the pricing of their parts in order to reduce the attractiveness of black market components.

Security device manufacturers

- **Targeting older vehicles:** The majority of HGVs stolen in 1994 were produced between five and ten years ago. This suggests that suppliers of retrofit security devices (fitted after manufacture) need to focus their marketing effort on older vehicles.
- **Type of security device:** Effective barriers to theft need to be identified, developed and promoted.

HGV owners

- **Buying legitimate components:** As the market for illegitimate parts is purely demand led, HGV owners should ensure that they buy used components from legitimate dealers.

- **Installing security devices:** Although vehicle security can be costly, it is a small outlay compared to the potential losses (increased insurance premiums, loss of business etc) ensuing from a vehicle being stolen.

- **Improving the security of company depots:** Consideration should still be paid to installing robust perimeter security. Wherever possible, the HGV should be kept in a locked building when not in use. Measures which increase the level of surveillance should also be considered, such as security lighting (especially if used in conjunction with security guards or CCTV).

HGV drivers

- **Using vehicle security:** Drivers should always make full use of any available vehicle security. Keys should always be removed from the ignition, security devices should be armed and cab doors locked - even if the vehicle is being left for only a short time.
- **Handling keys:** Keys should always be taken with the driver when the vehicle is left and should not be hidden anywhere on the vehicle.
- **Choosing parking locations:** Parking places should be chosen carefully. Drivers should be particularly vigilant when leaving a vehicle on an industrial estate, as these places are prone to high levels of theft.

Other related Crime Prevention Unit Papers:

Crime Prevention Unit Paper 32: Tackling Car Crime

Crime Prevention Unit Paper 33: Car Theft in England and Wales