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City tries to make parking lots safer

Five lots recognized for the safety measures put in place

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VANCOUVER SUN

VANCOUVER | The city's battle against auto crime went underground Friday in an attempt to make parking lots safer.

"We have all heard that property crime in Vancouver is at an unacceptable level," Vancouver police Const. Jeff Campbell said from the P2 level of the Pacific Centre parking lot, as police named the lots they'd chosen as winners of their new Safer Parking Initiative.

Five parking lots were recognized: four operated through city-owned EasyPark, and another managed by Diamond Parking.

Vancouver police say about 16,000 cars are broken into every year, but exact numbers on how many were in commercial parking lots — above or below ground — is not known.

Police did also not have statistics on crimes directed at individuals in parking lots, such as robbery, assault or sexual assault.

People base decisions on safety issues, councillor says

From B1

Canadian Direct Insurance, one of the program's sponsors, said drivers should seek lots which are bright and clean; have clear signing, obvious entrances and exits for pedestrians and vehicles; and have security that includes patrols and emergency telephones.

City Councillor Kim Capri said there are sound financial reasons for parking lot operators and retail businesses to increase safety in parking lots.

"There is a business case to do this. People choose their parking lots and they choose things based on safety," Capri said.

Sheryl Williamson-Harms, chair of the West End Citizens Action Network, applauded the efforts of the city, police and parking authorities.

Her concern is that managers of residential parking lots put similar security measures in place, or thieves will target their properties.

"I don't think there are many of us who frequent the downtown who have not had a vehicle broken into," she said.

Williamson-Harms said officers in community police stations are helping residential lot owners improve their security as well.

Capri said she would like Olympic organizers to cooperate with the project so visitors to Vancouver in 2010 can go online to find safe parking spots.

The five lots recognized Friday are: Diamond Parking's Pacific Palisades Hotel at 1277 Robson St., and the city-managed EasyPark lots at 900 West Cordova St., 160 Water St., Pacific Centre, and Pacific Centre North, at 777 Dunsmuir.

EasyPark had gross revenues of \$20 million operating city parking lots in 2007, and net revenue of \$12.6 million.

Future lots that meet the standards can be found at: www.SaferParkingVancouver.com.

The Vancouver Safer Parking Initiative is based on a similar program in the United Kingdom.

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