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WESTCOAST NEWS.

Twenty-five parking lots win official seal of approval



RICHARD LAM/VANCOUVER SUN

Shevy Levy parks each day at the award-winning EasyPark garage on Water Street, where she's never had problems.

Program targets parking lot crime

BY ALLISON CROSS
VANCOUVER SUN

VANCOUVER | Twenty-five of the city's parking lots have been officially dubbed the safest in the city.

The Safer Parking Initiative, in partnership with the Vancouver police department, released a list of parking lots on Thursday that have passed muster and received awards for preventing crime and making patrons feel safe.

The group wants residents, and especially tourists, to leave their cars in the award-winning lots and avoid parking in ones that haven't made the list.

Diamond Parking dominat-



RICHARD LAM/VANCOUVER SUN

Greg Johnson says his car's been safe at the EasyPark lot.

ed the list, with 11 of their facilities receiving a Safer Parking award.

"Vancouver is not a violent city," said Danica Wolfe, a rep-

safety, but they do feel afraid for their vehicles."

The program, which started in February, is modelled after one started in the U.K. 14 years ago that saw dramatic reductions in property crime.

A recent Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association survey found that parking ranked second among factors that people dislike most about downtown.

About 500 incidents of theft from vehicles occur every month in the downtown core, said Const. Jeff Campbell of the Vancouver police department.

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Operators must make upgrades

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"Our data suggests about a third of the crimes that occur actually get reported," said Campbell, who helped develop and launch the Safer Parking Initiative.

Unsafe parking lots are full of clues telling drivers not to park there, he said.

"If you see lots of glass, it's clearly a spot for break-and-enters," Campbell said. "That operator isn't taking much care if they haven't even cleaned the glass. If it smells of urine, not a good place to park."

To receive the award, parking lot owners must make safety and security upgrades recommended by a Vancouver police officer who visits their facility.

These include clearly marked entrances and exits, good lighting, security guards and overall cleanliness.

"We want an environment that feels like a public space," Wolfe said. "If it doesn't feel like anti-social space, people won't go there to loiter."

Crime in the parking lot doesn't need to fall dramatically for owners to receive the award, she said, but it does have to be lower than in the surrounding area.

Tourists are particularly susceptible to vehicle crime, Campbell said, because of what they leave inside their vehicles.

"Sometimes they leave laptops and cash and suitcases," he said. "Thieves quickly learn about what they can find."

Tourists don't often complain about parking lots in Vancouver, said Katie Emery of Tourism Vancouver. "The number of tourists who drive to Vancouver from B.C., and from Ontario and Alberta is up from last year," she said.

A reduction in vehicle crime could help ensure tourists have a better experience in Vancouver, Emery said.

Shevy Levy parks her car every day in one of the award-winning lots, at EasyPark at 150 Water St., and she's never had any problems. She runs a business in Gastown and her clients often ask her for a safe place to leave their vehicles.

"I try to keep my trunk empty," she said. "But it's well-lit here and there's always someone walking around."

Greg Johnson, said his car has stayed untouched in the Water Street lot, but he hasn't been so lucky in other downtown facilities. "It's one of the reasons I stopped driving downtown," he said.

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Safer parking facilities:

- 160 Water St. (EasyPark)
- 701 W. Georgia St. (EasyPark)
- 777 Dunsmuir St. (EasyPark)
- 900 W. Cordova St. (EasyPark)
- Pacific Palisades Hotel (Diamond Parking)
- Jewish Community Centre 950 W. 41st Ave (Diamond Parking)
- Bentall Centre, 540 Thurlow St. (Advanced Parking)
- Bentall Centre, 550 Burrard St. (Advanced Parking)
- Bentall Centre, 1040 W. Pender St. (Advanced Parking)
- 500 W. Cordova St. Harbour Centre (Owned by Polaris Realty, managed by Impark)
- 450 W. Cordova St., Harbour Centre (Owned by Polaris Realty, managed by Impark)
- 999 W. Hastings St. Axa Building (Owned by Polaris Realty, managed by Impark)
- Westin Bayshore Main Parkade, 1620 Bayshore Drive (Managed by Westin)
- Westin Bayshore Central Parkade, 1675 Bayshore Drive (Managed by Westin)
- 1495 W. 8th Ave (Diamond Parking)
- 933 Seymour St. (Diamond Parking)
- Capers Market, 1675 Robson St. (Diamond Parking)
- 1505 Mariners Walk (Diamond Parking)
- 2150 W. Broadway (Diamond Parking)
- 1154 W. Broadway (Diamond Parking)
- 817 Denman St. (Diamond Parking)
- 1420 W. Georgia St. (Diamond Parking)
- 2012 McDonald St. (Diamond Parking)
- 1131 - 1151 Haro St. (In rear alley, Diamond Parking)
- 1034 -1040 Robson St. (In rear alley, Diamond Parking)