



*Nineteen guns (types shown) were reported missing to Gainesville police from car burglaries between May 1 and July 31. Five have since been recovered. (Graphic courtesy of Gainesville Police Department)*

## **GUNS MISSING IN UPTICK OF GAINESVILLE, ALACHUA COUNTY CAR BURGLARIES**

By Sara Marino

🕒 August 29, 2016 📁 Public safety

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Robyn Ackerman's Ruger pistol was stolen in mid-July from her truck while it was parked at her home on Northwest 41st Lane in Gainesville.

The 2012 Dodge pickup was locked and had its alarm on, and she called Gainesville police once she noticed that the gun, its case, her granddaughter's cell phone, a box of tissues and hand sanitizer were missing.

"I have a concealed-weapons permit, have hunted all my life and am very careful with guns, but my first thought [was], 'It's in the hands of someone who obviously does not obey the law,'" the 53-year-old woman wrote in an email to WUFT News.

"Each day, I think, 'Will this be the day I get a call that it has been used in a robbery [or] murder, or a child picked it up and was injured by it?' I will have to live with that, if that day ever comes. We pray it doesn't."

Ackerman is one of 19 people who reported to the Gainesville Police Department that their guns were stolen from their vehicles between May 1 and July 31. (The types of guns stolen are shown in the graphic at

the top of this.)

Many of the cars weren't locked, but Ackerman said she knows her truck was.

Gainesville police have been looking for the missing guns and have recovered five of them, police spokesman Ben Tobias said in a news release.

"Some of the guns have been found, but there are guns out on the street that are there because they were in unlocked vehicles," Tobias later told WUFT News in a phone interview.

In Ackerman's case, the possible burglar, a teenager, was found by police through fingerprints on the truck and, later, on the recovered tissue box and hand sanitizer, Ackerman said. But the gun wasn't found, she added.

The gun thefts are part of an overall increase in car burglaries in Gainesville and Alachua County.

Gainesville police have "investigated over 450 reports of car burglary in 2016, almost a 50 percent increase to the number investigated by this time last year," Tobias wrote in the release.

"The advice is simple: Take a couple of seconds when you are leaving your car, and double check to make sure that you're locking your vehicle," Tobias told WUFT News. "I do it myself, and I've actually found a couple of times in my own police car where I thought I had locked my vehicle. And I pull on the handle to check, and it turned out I did not, in fact, lock it."

The car burglaries mostly happen in parking lots at larger apartment complexes, Tobias said.

Gainesville police frequently patrol such lots and check parked vehicles to see whether they're locked, he said. Of those, at least 60 percent are unlocked.

Meanwhile, the Alachua County Sheriff's Office has received 348 reports of car burglaries so far in 2016, office spokesman Art Forgey said. That number was 199 as of this time last year — a 42.8 percent increase.

Though the county's increase of car thefts are also attributed to unlocked doors, they haven't led to "a large number of guns taken," Forgey told WUFT News by email.

The areas in which cars are most often broken into are hotels, some subdivisions and apartment complexes, he said.

To avoid such thefts, Forgey offered recommendations similar to Tobias: "Lock their doors," he wrote in the

email. "Keep valuables out of sight, and park in a well-lit area, if possible."

Ackerman said that after the items were taken from her truck, she has been leaving nothing in it and makes sure it's locked three to four times.

"I work hard — and have all my life — for what I want to get or buy," she wrote. "And it's disheartening when someone who has no regard [and] probably never worked a day ... feels it's OK to not only touch something that is not theirs but to take it."

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