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## Pets

One in a series of weekly columns of advice by pet experts. **Today:** Lisa Peterson

# Beware of the dog-nappers and protect your pet

In just one month this summer, dog-nappers snatched a puppy from a 5-year-old child's lap in a public park in Idaho, a Lhasa Apso from a backyard in North Carolina and a 16-week-old boxer from the owner's yard in Oklahoma.

The American Kennel Club first alerted the public to this growing trend in April 2008 and has continued to informally track incidents of dog theft. In 2008 at least 71 dog thefts were covered in media reports; so far this year there have been more than 100. In response, a number of states have considered legislation that would address pet theft. The Texas legislature, for example, considered a law making pet theft a felony, while California and Delaware have tried to regulate roadside pet sales, where stolen pets are often re-sold.

There are many reasons why someone would steal a pet, but primarily, criminals have become aware of the financial and emotional value dogs have in a society that increasingly regards pets as family members. Some thieves aim to collect a ransom (and a few successfully have, as in a recent California incident where the pet owner paid \$10,000 for the return of a dog taken from her parked car); others are simply trying to make a few hundred dollars by selling the dog to unsuspecting buyers. Some thieves may want to keep the pet as their own.

Here are some tips to help you avoid falling victim to pet-nappers:

### Prevention

- ▶ Don't leave your dog unattended in your yard for long periods, especially if your fenced-in yard is visible from the street.

- ▶ Be cautious with information. If strangers approach to admire your dog during walks, don't answer questions about how much the dog cost or give details about where you live.

- ▶ Never leave your dog in an unattended car, even if it's locked. Besides the obvious health risks this poses to the dog, it's also an invitation for thieves, even if you are gone for only a moment.

- ▶ Don't tie your dog outside a store. If you need to go shopping, patronize only dog-friendly retailers or leave the dog at home.

### Recovery

- ▶ Protect your dog with microchip identification. Keep contact information current with your microchip recovery service provider.

- ▶ If you suspect your dog has been stolen, call the police/animal control officer in the area your pet was last seen. File a police report. If your dog has a microchip, ask to have the serial number and the dog's description posted in the "stolen article" list on the National Crime Information Center.

- ▶ Have fliers with a recent photo ready so you can distribute immediately if your pet goes missing.