



Crime Prevention Recommendations For Cab Company Owners, Drivers and Dispatchers

Taxicab drivers are particularly vulnerable to robbery, assault and homicide. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), taxi drivers are 60 times more likely to be murdered while on the job than other workers. Taxi drivers are also victim to more violent assaults than any other occupation with the exception of police and private security.

From 2005 to 2007, there was an average of 17 reported cab robberies per year in the City of St. Petersburg, with no homicides occurring during that time period. So far in 2008 there have been 16 cab robberies with two homicides taking place.

Typically a cab robbery in St. Petersburg occurs in the following fashion;

- After dark (82%), usually in the late evening or early morning hours.
- With the driver being dispatched (74%) to the location where they are met by the suspect(s).
- With the suspect(s) entering the cab (73%) and taking a position in the back seat.
- With the robbery taking place shortly after the suspect(s) has entered the cab or upon arrival at the destination location.
- The weapon of choice in most cab robberies is a handgun (65%). Knives were second (17%).
- 54% of robberies were committed by a lone suspect, 35% by two and 11% by three or more.
- Cab robberies occur relatively evenly across all days of the week.

In lieu of the increase in violence directed towards cab drivers, the St. Petersburg Police Department is offering the following suggestions as a means to enhance driver safety. While none of these suggestions are a guarantee of safety in what is an inherently dangerous occupation, we believe their partial or full implementation would do much to decrease the risk factors.

Screening of Calls:

- Have dispatcher ask for the customer's full name, home address & phone # (where they reside) and the phone # they are calling from. Ask them to repeat the information to verify its reliability. A person giving false information will have difficulty repeating the same information accurately twice.
- Ask the customer for their location, their intended destination and the number of passengers who will be riding. If calling from a cell phone, ask the customer to meet the driver at a nearby busy intersection if possible. If questioned by the customer, the dispatcher can cite driver safety as the reason for the additional precautions.
- Call back the phone number given by the customer to verify the information provided.
- At any point, if concerns arise that the caller is being evasive or is giving false information, **don't dispatch a cab**. Notify your fellow cab companies of the address in question and call the police.
- Have a Caller ID system to verify the phone numbers customers are calling from.
- Install a system to record incoming calls and make customers aware their call is being recorded. This may deter suspects and could aid police in the event something does happen.
- Maintain a database of repeat customers names and addresses to help the dispatcher screen out high risk calls.

Safety Equipment:

- Security cameras/video recorders, coupled with appropriate written warnings of its use, can act as a deterrent. It also provides police with an image of the suspect if anything should occur.
- Partitions or shields between drivers and passengers can protect the drivers and act as a deterrent to criminal acts.
- A switch which can be covertly activated, such as using a foot switch, to open the microphone on the two way radio so that dispatchers will know the driver is in trouble. Driver will need to be trained to give verbal clues that a robbery is occurring. It has no deterrent value.
- Alarms which sound and cause headlights to flash when a "panic button" is depressed.
- Global Positioning Systems (GPS) can help locate drivers in distress.

Addition Safety Precautions:

- Limit the amount of cash carried by drivers or switch to credit or debit card only system. The least lucrative a cab robbery becomes, the more likely that robbery rates will drop.
- Begin a Cab Crime Watch. Drivers and dispatchers should report suspicious activities to the police as soon as possible and contact other cab companies to notify them as well.
- Set stringent safety guidelines for drivers and dispatchers and assure they are followed. A significant aspect of any cab safety program is the communication of information about crimes or suspicious activity that will protect other drivers and help police apprehend potential suspects.

Safety Tips for Drivers:

- Humanize yourself to the passenger by displaying a friendly, confident attitude especially during the first few moments of contact. Studies indicate that people who commit violent crimes often need to dehumanize their victims before they attack and often look for passive, vulnerable individuals who can be easily intimidated.
- Trust your instincts and your judgment. If you have a feeling that something is wrong, you are probably right. Be leery of customers who avoid eye contact, appear hostile, nervous or tense. Look for individuals who are overly dressed for the weather conditions. Coats, hooded sweatshirts or hats worn low over the face may suggest the person maybe trying to hide their face or are trying to conceal a weapon.
- Always keep your guard up and don't become complacent. Problems often arise when you least expect them.
- Be alert to bystanders. If one person hails you (or the call says it's only one fare) and more suddenly arrive, drive on.
- Make a mental note of what the fare in your cab looks like and what he or she is wearing. Pay special attention to distinguishing features of the person (Poor teeth, tattoos, scars, etc.). This information can be helpful to the police if a crime is committed.
- Don't keep cash in your shirt pockets. It's too easy for a robber to reach.
- Keep your trip sheet up to date and out of sight. If a fare asked if you have been busy, respond with "I just started" or "It's been a slow night".
- Know the location of police departments, firehouses, hotels, diners and any other 24-hour establishments in case you are faced with an emergency.

- Never chase after a robber. Obtain an accurate description and call police immediately.
- Try to keep fares out of the front seat. You should consider this your safe area. A criminal seated in the front seat has easy access to you, your money and he or she can disable your radio system, cutting off your contact with help. Avoid having single passengers sit directly behind you and ask them to sit on the right rear seat.
- It is recommended taxi drivers have a cellular phone for emergencies. However, in many robberies, the suspect(s) will take the victim's cell phone to impede them from calling the police so don't keep in plain view.
- Taxicabs should have an easily readable sign or decal that advises passengers the drivers never carries more than \$20.00 in currency or change.
- If a taxi driver accumulates over \$40-\$50 in cash, stop and make a deposit or secrete the money in a hidden portion of the cab.
- Do not openly display currency and avoid wearing a large amount of jewelry.
- Avoid carrying personal property like credit cards, checks, money, etc...
- Taxi drivers and dispatchers should have codes and procedures to follow in the event of an emergency.
- If a passenger insists on paying you outside of the cab, open your window just enough to receive the cash. Don't be tricked into getting out of the cab.
- Keep your doors locked and your windows up when at traffic lights and intersections as robbery suspects will sometimes target these locations.
- Avoid alleys or dead ends. Leave yourself an escape route if something goes wrong.
- Taxicab drivers should "**NEVER RESIST**" a robbery attempt. To do so will likely escalate the use of violence by the suspect. Attempt to remain calm, behave in a cooperative manner and look for opportunities to get help.
- Taxicab drivers should not rely on firearms or other weapons as a means of defense in the event of robbery or assault. In most situations, the suspect has a tactical advantage in both surprise and positioning. Any attempt to reach for a firearm during a robbery would increase the likelihood a suspect would resort to deadly force in their own self defense.