

2006 Auto Theft Prevention



Report to the State of Minnesota
Governor and Legislature

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Report prepared by

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AUTO THEFT PREVENTION PROGRAM
Minnesota Statutes 2004, Section 65B.84
January 1, 2007

PROGRAM MISSION

To reduce motor vehicle theft and its consequences in the State of Minnesota by funding programs which aid in the:

- Identification of Critical Issues
- Education and Awareness
- Investigation and Prosecution

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

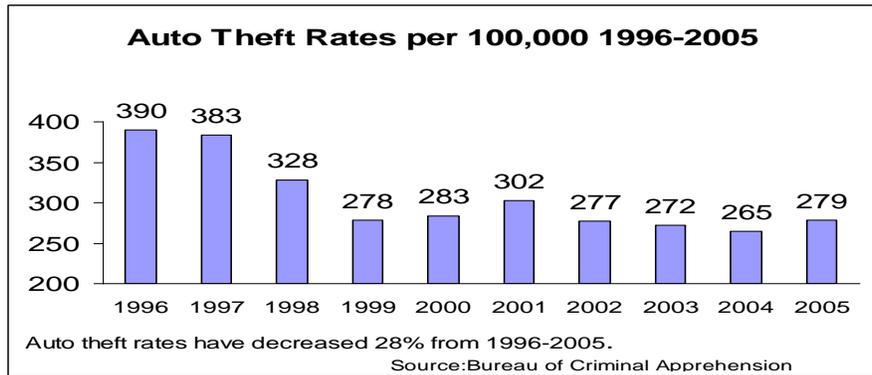
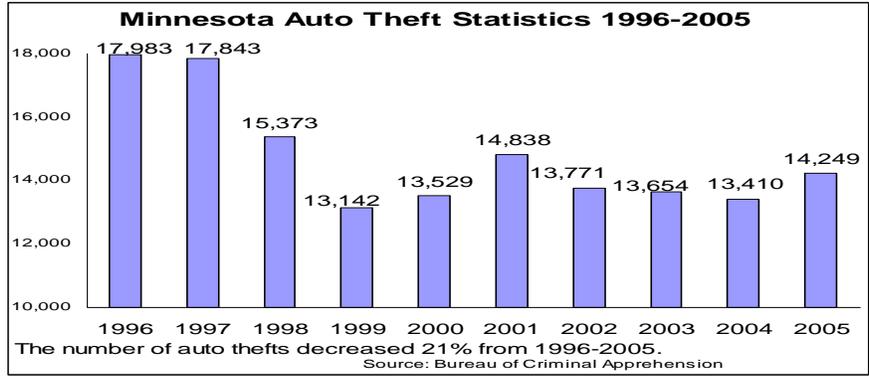
In 1996 the Minnesota Legislature created the Auto Theft Prevention Program. This program is funded from a surcharge that is collected from automobile insurance carriers that provide comprehensive insurance coverage issued in the State of Minnesota. The amount of the surcharge is \$.50 cents per vehicle for every six months of coverage. Utilizing this funding, the program makes money available through a competitive grant process for activities to address the problem of auto theft in the State of Minnesota.

In July 2004, the Auto Theft Prevention Program was transferred to the Department of Commerce. The Department of Public Safety, Office of Justice Programs continued to administer program grants via an interagency agreement between the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Commerce.

EXTENT OF AUTO THEFT IN MINNESOTA

In 2005, the number of actual motor vehicle thefts reported in Minnesota was 14,249, an increase of 6.3 percent from 2004. Motor vehicle theft represents 9 percent of property crimes in Minnesota and indicates a theft rate of 279 per 100,000 residents, an average of 39 thefts per day. The average dollar loss per motor vehicle theft was \$4,121; motor vehicle theft was 24% of Dollars Lost to Serious Crime (these values do not include the stolen and recovered values for Minneapolis PD).

Overall, Minnesota continues to experience a significant decline in motor vehicle thefts since 1996. The number of motor vehicle thefts decreased 21% compared with 1996 data; this compares to a national decline of 11.4% over the same period.



**Auto Thefts in Major Cities and Counties in Minnesota,
1996 and 2005**

	1996	2005	%Change 1996-2005
Anoka County	950	854	-10.1%
Fridley	145	140	-3.4%
Coon Rapids	173	135	-22.0%
Dakota County	849	540	-36.4%
Burnsville	227	89	-60.8%
W. St. Paul	110	82	-25.5%
Hennepin County	7,674	5,541	-27.8%
Minneapolis	5,650	3,894	-31.1%
Bloomington	396	170	-57.1%
Brooklyn Park	230	303	31.7%
Olmsted Co. (Rochester)	145	169	16.6%
Ramsey County	3,278	3,249	-0.9%
St. Paul	2,638	2,448	-7.2%
Maplewood	168	250	48.8%
Roseville	130	149	14.6%
St. Louis County	583	404	-30.7%
Duluth	398	208	-47.7%
Stearns Co. (St. Cloud)	206	195	-5.3%
Washington County	329	444	35.0%

Source: Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Although vehicle theft is primarily a crime of opportunity, perpetrators often favor particular makes and models. Thieves target a wide range of popular passenger vehicles, often seeking valuable parts from older model year vehicles for sale on the black market.

According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), the following list ranks the ten most stolen vehicles in Minnesota in 2005.

Rank Year – Make – Model

1	1995	Honda Civic
2	1991	Toyota Camry
3	1989	Oldsmobile Cutlass
4	1994	Honda Accord
5	1996	Chevrolet Blazer
6	1992	Buick Century
7	1993	Saturn SL
8	1992	Dodge Caravan
9	1996	Ford Explorer
10	1994	Chevrolet Full Size C/K 1500 Pickup

TYPES OF THEFT & TRENDS

- Thefts of Opportunity – It remains that many autos are stolen because the auto was left unattended with keys left in them.
- Use of counterfeit cashier and payroll checks to purchase vehicles from a private party.
- Gangs stripping cars for profit.
- Identity theft. 1) Use of another’s identity to fraudulently purchase or lease a new or used vehicle, or 2) Thieves use personal information found within a stolen vehicle for identity theft purposes.
- Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) switching.
- Increased thefts from auto dealer’s sales lots. These cases typically involve either a customer not returning from a test drive or a dealer noticing a vehicle missing from inventory when inventory is checked. Dealerships fail to account for keys to cars on the sales lots.

- Increased theft of high-priced luxury vehicles and SUVs.
- Use of stolen vehicles as a commodity for purchasing drugs.
- “Dope Rentals” – Offender claims to have “rented” the car in exchange for controlled substances.
- Auto thefts that tie in with burglaries in which vehicles that were parked at homes were used as a moving van.

PROFILE OF PERPETRATORS

The profile of auto thieves has not changed significantly. There are generally two types of motor vehicle thieves; opportunists and professionals.

- Young males in their 20’s taking advantage of crimes of opportunity. This includes taking vehicles when no one is around and the keys are left in the ignition, as well as taking vehicles that are running or warming up in the cold weather.
- Perpetrator who needs a vehicle for transportation to ride across town; locates a vehicle with the keys in the ignition, and takes it to his or her destination. In a number of cases, the perpetrator has continued to use the stolen vehicle as his or her mode of transportation, often disguising the vehicle with stolen license plates or placing some type of temporary license on the vehicle to avoid detection.
- Thieves on a crime spree. They will steal a vehicle drive it somewhere, drop it off, and steal another vehicle and so on.
- Perpetrator stealing motor vehicles for a living and later selling the vehicle or its component parts.
- Person or persons stealing the vehicles often obtain the vehicle on behalf of another criminal, who then facilitates in the later transfer or cutting up of the vehicle.
- An organized group of individuals led by “habitual offenders” who steal cars along with their associated crimes such as the use of counterfeit cashier checks and payroll checks to purchase vehicles.
- In some cases where the perpetrator was identified, it was learned that they are often paid in drugs. If they are paid in cash, they often use the money to support a drug habit.
- Juvenile “joyrider”.
- Juvenile affiliated with a gang or gang initiation.

TYPES OF AUTO THEFT PREVENTION PROGRAMS FUNDED

Grant applications are solicited from county attorney's offices, law enforcement agencies, neighborhood and community organizations, and business organizations. Priority is given to proposed projects that 1) establish or enhance a collaborative effort between two or more agencies, 2) include counties or regions with the greatest rates of automobile theft, 3) employ proven or promising strategies that reduce the incidence of automobile theft, or 4) address automobile theft that is perpetrated as part of a criminal enterprise.

Applications may be submitted for the following types of projects:

1. Training (criminal justice, citizen and business, etc.)
2. Public Education (public meetings, literature, public service announcements, neighborhood and business watch promotions, etc.)
3. Programs designed to improve or expand the resources of existing auto theft prevention, investigation, apprehension, or prosecution activities.
4. Multi-Jurisdictional projects combining the resources of different agencies in the task force approach to combat auto theft.
5. Long-term specialized training to further the expertise of auto theft investigators or prosecutors.

PROGRAM RESULTS

The Auto Theft Prevention grants were funded for the 24 month period of July 1, 2005 through June 30, 2007. Funded projects include six law enforcement agencies, five county attorney offices, two criminal justice agencies, and three non-profit organizations. Grantees and grant amounts are listed in the Appendix.

Grant recipients complete statistical and narrative reports on a quarterly basis. The following statistics are generated from reports from six law enforcement agencies, and four county attorney offices over the 15 month period of July 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006.

Law Enforcement Statistics

Placing specially trained law enforcement officers in the field to focus on auto theft criminals is the most effective method of reducing thefts.

- Number of Vehicles reported stolen: 9,172

- Number of vehicles recovered: 6,686
- Number of vehicles processed for evidence: 1,405
- Number of vehicle theft investigations initiated: 4,957
- Number of vehicle theft arrests: 1,483
- Number of non auto theft related arrests generated by auto theft grant activities: 58

Prosecution Statistics

Prosecution and conviction of automobile thieves is one of the most important means of breaking vehicle theft rings and reducing the economic incentives of vehicle theft. Assigning a special prosecutor to handle auto theft cases is an effective method in achieving convictions.

- Number of cases referred:

Vehicle Theft Only – Adult	1,267
Vehicle Theft Only – Juvenile	1,039*
Vehicle Theft with related charges – Adult	315
Vehicle Theft with related Charges - Juvenile	118*
- Number of cases charged 1,898
- Number of convictions 1,215
- Number of defendants:

Sent to Prison	204
Sent to Jail	509
Alternative Sentences	461**

* Juvenile statistics from Dakota County not included.

** Juveniles are not sent to prison or jail, thus all of their sentences would be considered “alternative sentences.”

CASES

The following is an example of some of the cases the prosecutors see:

Repeat Offenders

One defendant fled when police tried to initiate a traffic stop. During the chase, it was determined that the car being driven was stolen. The defendant abandoned that vehicle and took off on foot only to steal a second car. Police soon located the defendant in the second stolen vehicle and again the defendant fled, causing damage to private and public property in three cities.

Anoka & Washington County Attorneys ATP Project

A party reported that someone had gotten a vehicle stuck on his property. The driver left the scene prior to police arriving and the vehicle turned out to be stolen. Items belonging to the suspect were found inside the car and he was charged. This same defendant fled from police the following month in a stolen car and ultimately damaged several police cars before being stopped. Within 48 hours of being released from jail on this second

charge, he was back at it again stealing an RV from a business. The defendant's cell phone was found at the scene. He is a suspect in approximately 7 to 10 other cases.

South Metro Auto Theft Prosecution

This offender has an exceptionally prolific history of committing motor vehicle theft and related offenses, being caught in five stolen vehicles during the first quarter of 2006 alone, and yet another on December 29, 2005. Four of the incidents occurred between January 11, 2006 and January 20, 2006. All six vehicles involved in the incidents were Honda Civics and all had peeled steering columns. The offender was only 12 years old when he committed all of these offenses.

Four incidents occurred in Hennepin County, and the other two occurred in Wright and Ramsey Counties. Two of the incidents included fleeing police in the vehicles, including the Wright county incident, in which the Civic fled police going 100 miles per hour just outside the city limits of Big Lake.

The offender's friend, a 15 year old male, was with him during most of the incidents; they have identified themselves to police as being members of the Purple Brothers Asian street gang.

In March, 2006 the offender admitted several charges stemming from several of the incidents, and the remaining charges were dismissed as part of a plea negotiation. The offender was an adjudicated delinquent, placed on probation, ordered to attend school and to abstain from drugs and alcohol, to commit no new offenses – especially motor vehicle related offenses, and given a ten month out-of-home placement in the Intensive Day Treatment (IDT) program at Woodland Hills in Duluth.

Hennepin County Attorney's Office

Repeat Victim

An ongoing case in Anoka County involved a woman whose car was stolen from her workplace in St. Paul. The car was found being driven in Anoka County by an adult male who was charged with Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle. While advising the victim of the plea and sentencing date for the adult, the victim advised staff that her car had been stolen from work again, that a juvenile was caught and charged in Hennepin County, and that the juvenile was being transferred to Anoka County for disposition. Anoka County staff attended the sentencing for both the juvenile and the adult with this victim. The victim has subsequently resigned from her job in St. Paul for security and safety reasons. It was a unique challenge for Anoka County staff to work with this victim through both the adult and juvenile systems, dealing with restitution for the recovery and damage to the vehicle after the first theft, and then again after the second theft.

Anoka & Washington County Attorneys ATP Project

The K-Mart Auto Thief

West St. Paul Police were doing their routine patrol on a busy main road. Off to the side of the road is a K-Mart with a large open parking lot facing the road. It was 2:00 AM and

there was only one car in the parking lot. The vehicle was the cleaning person's. WSP police noticed that another car was approaching the parked vehicle. Police went around the back of the store and pulled into the parking lot. The defendant was caught with a screwdriver in hand standing next to a broken window of the vehicle. Police arrested the defendant and while searching his vehicle incident to impoundment police, found a stack of papers printed off of the internet entitled "How to Break Into Cars".

South Metro Auto Theft Prosecution

Financial Crimes

The offender used counterfeit checks and empty envelope deposits to inflate his bank account balance, giving the impression monies were available for the purchase of motor vehicles. The offender purchased a 2000 Cadillac Escalade for \$19,338.43, using a check drawn against his account. The check was returned as worthless, no funds available. The offender also purchased a 1998 Mercedes Benz for \$16,046.75 and a 1995 Chevrolet Tahoe for \$8,586.18. Both purchases were drawn against his bank account – both checks were returned as worthless, no funds available. All of the vehicles were recovered, and the offender was charged with Felony Theft by Swindle and received a three year stayed sentence and 365 days in the Hennepin County Workhouse.

Minnesota Financial Crimes Task force

Identity Theft

The suspect took over the identity of several individuals for the purpose of financing vehicles. The suspect purchased a 2003 Land Rover from a Minnesota dealership and presented a counterfeit Minnesota D/L and counterfeit insurance documentation to secure the vehicle. The transaction took place on 1/13/2006; the vehicle purchase price was \$47,353.54.

On 1/26/2006, the suspect purchased a 2004 Bentley in Illinois. The vehicle was shipped to a southside Minneapolis address where the suspect took custody of the vehicle; the purchase price was \$148,318.67.

On 2/7/2006 a 2004 BMW was purchased in Florida, purchase price \$76,994.18. The suspect refused to accept the delivery/pickup of the vehicle.

On 2/10/2006 a 2005 Dodge Magnum was purchased in Illinois. The purchase price was \$26,658.00. The vehicle was shipped to Minnesota and the taskforce was in place to intercept it. The delivery driver called the suspect to set up the delivery and the suspect indicated that he no longer wanted the vehicle.

On 2/17/2006, members of the MNFCTF executed a search warrant at an address in St. Paul. During the course of this search warrant the Land Rover was recovered. Other evidence including a loaded handgun, narcotics, stolen mortgage information, counterfeit D/L's, motor vehicle paperwork, and stolen property was recovered. During the course of the investigation it was learned that the Bentley was on a car carrier traveling from Illinois to Minnesota. Apparently the suspect had lost the keys and had to have it re-

keyed in Illinois at the dealership. Detectives of the MNFCTF were able to get the vehicle stopped in Wisconsin and the Bentley was returned to the dealership in Illinois. The suspect remained at-large.

On 3/08/2006, the suspect assumed the identity of another living individual and purchased a 2006 Dodge Magnum in Iowa. The suspect got away clean with the \$48,130.85 vehicle.

On 3/22/2006, members of the MNFCTF and the St. Paul Police Department arrested the suspect driving the Dodge Magnum stolen on 3/08/2006. After a brief foot chase the suspect was taken into custody. In total, the suspect in this case used identity takeovers to steal motor vehicles with a combined value of \$347,454.70. On 9/07/2006, the suspect was charged with four counts of Identity Theft over \$35,000.

Minnesota Financial Crimes Task Force

Multiple Vehicles and Multiple defendants

This case involves four males and one female involved in multiple incidents traversing across state lines. In late April, 2006 they went to rural Baldwin, Wisconsin and neighboring communities stealing multiple vehicles and tampering with other vehicles in close proximity to interstate 94. They brought the vehicles back to St. Paul where they used the cars to support their trade of methamphetamine and other stolen cars. Through collaboration and extensive investigations Ramsey County was able to prosecute multiple defendants.

Ramsey County Attorney's Office

Prosecuting VIN Flips

A complex VIN flip prosecution took place after a defendant was arrested in June, 2006 for driving a stolen red 1990 Acura Integra in St. Paul. The vehicle was stolen from Brooklyn Park approximately a week earlier. At the time that the Defendant was driving the vehicle, there were no license plates on the car and the VIN plate on the dash was stripped. Various other VINS located on the vehicle all were identified belonging to multiple other vehicles. Also, multiple items of varying identities of others were found in the vehicle. With a thorough investigation and confrontation of the Defendant, the Defendant admitted he knew the car was stolen and the VINS had been "flipped". The Defendant has an extensive criminal history involving car thefts over the past six years.

Ramsey County Attorney's Office

COMMUNITY AUTO THEFT PREVENTION

As important as law enforcement officers and assistant prosecutors are in responding to auto thefts, any effort against auto theft must include the prevention activities of non-

profit community groups. These groups provide valuable “street” information to law enforcement teams which leads to arrests or vehicle recoveries.

The non-profit groups hold block club meetings to teach residents how to prevent auto theft, distribute materials (flyers or newsletters) regarding auto theft prevention. These activities are primarily responsible for increasing neighborhood awareness of auto theft and provide a pipeline of information to law enforcement teams.

PROGRAM IMPACT

It is difficult to measure the overall impact of the Minnesota Auto Theft Prevention Program due to the nature of auto theft. Auto theft is often a “crime of opportunity”; most vehicles are stolen with keys left in the ignition. In most cases the perpetrator is not found with the stolen vehicle in his/her possession. The criminal justice system response to auto theft reports is generally a low priority for a number of reasons: 1) often the vehicle is recovered (although it may be damaged), 2) it is difficult to locate and process evidence that will promptly and accurately lead to a suspect, and 3) diminished resources results in property crimes receiving less attention.

Given the nature of auto theft, a successful program, involves:

- Prevention through public education and awareness.
- Deterrence through bait vehicle, and “running sting” operations.
- Investigation and increased collection/processing of evidence.
- Prosecution and aggressive sentencing for repeat offenders.
- Law enforcement and community partnerships.

Statewide and program data would lead us to believe that we are achieving success.

- Offenses are “cleared” by arrest or solved when at least one person is arrested, charged and referred for prosecution. In Minnesota during 2005, there was a clearance rate of 18% for motor vehicle theft; at the national level the rate was 13%.

While results have been significant over the past nine years, an even greater impact is anticipated as we move into the future. Targeting funding to parts of the state that experience higher than average levels of auto theft appears to be working. In addition, after nine years programs are using results to identify “what works,” and best practices are now being employed throughout the state.

APPENDIX

**GRANT RECIPIENTS
July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2007**

Grant Recipient	Type of Program	Grant Amount
Anoka & Washington County Attorney's	Prosecution	\$228,933
Anti-Vehicle Crime Association of	Statewide Media	\$175,000
Anti-Vehicle Crime Association of	Statewide Training	\$29,450
City of Bemidji and Beltrami County	Law Enforcement	\$289,333
Bloomington Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$45,000
Brooklyn Center Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$134,439
Bureau of Criminal Apprehension	Criminal Justice Forensics	\$299,400
Dakota County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	\$269,182
District Two Community Council	Community	\$29,621
Duluth Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$290,495
Financial Crimes Task Force	Criminal Justice Prosecution	\$182,977
Hennepin County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	\$432,597
Minneapolis Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$350,131
Pillsbury United Communities	Community	\$100,000
Ramsey County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	\$470,000
St. Paul Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$149,946
	TOTAL	\$3,476,504.00