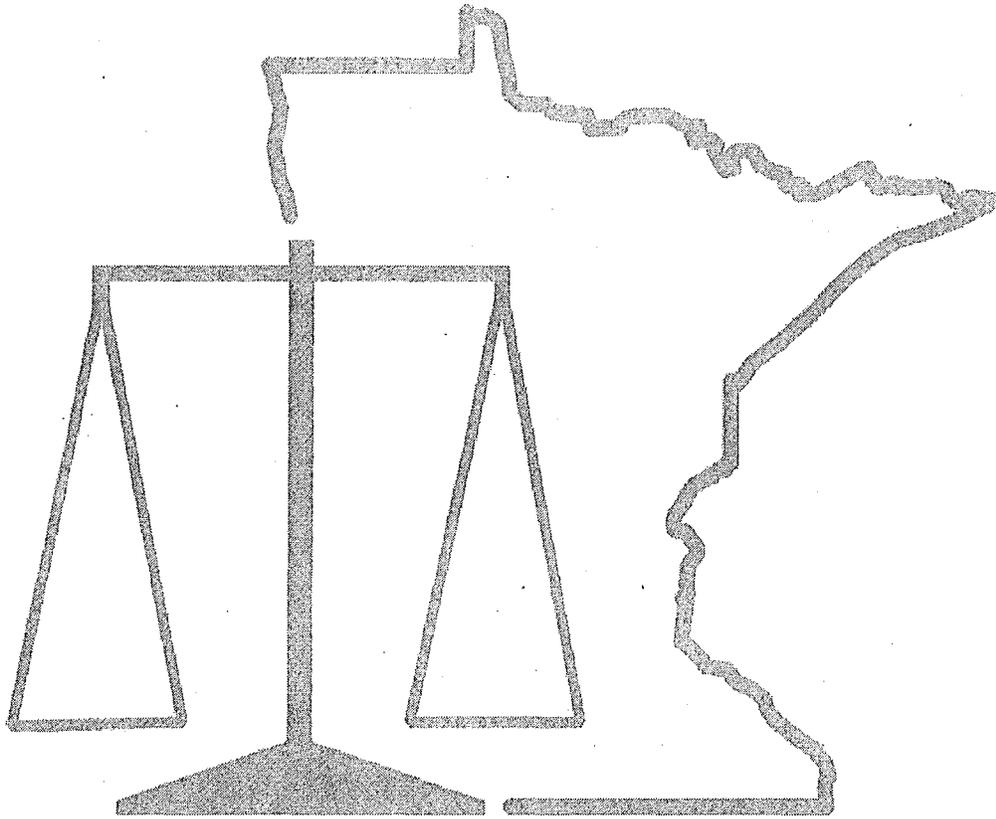


# Auto Theft Prevention Grant Program

09 - 0222



Report to the State of Minnesota  
Governor and Legislature

January 2009

**AUTO THEFT PREVENTION PROGRAM**  
**Minnesota Statutes 2004, Section 65B.84**  
**January 1, 2009**

**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.

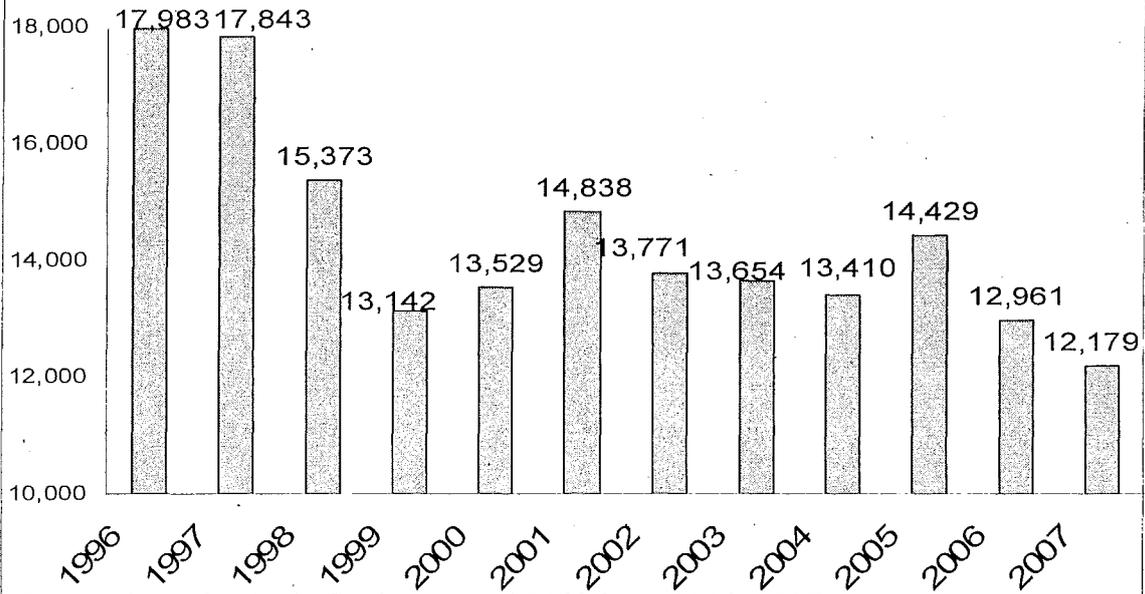
In July 2004, the Auto Theft Prevention Program was transferred to the Department of Commerce. The Department of Public Safety, Office of Justice Programs continued to administer program grants via an interagency agreement between the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Commerce.

**EXTENT OF AUTO THEFT IN MINNESOTA**

In 2007, the number of actual motor vehicle thefts reported in Minnesota was 12,179, a decrease of 6 percent from 2006. Motor vehicle theft represents 8 percent of property crimes in Minnesota and indicates a theft rate of 235 per 100,000 residents, an average of 33 thefts per day. The average dollar loss per motor vehicle theft was \$4,698; motor vehicle theft was 31% 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 32% compared with 1996 data.

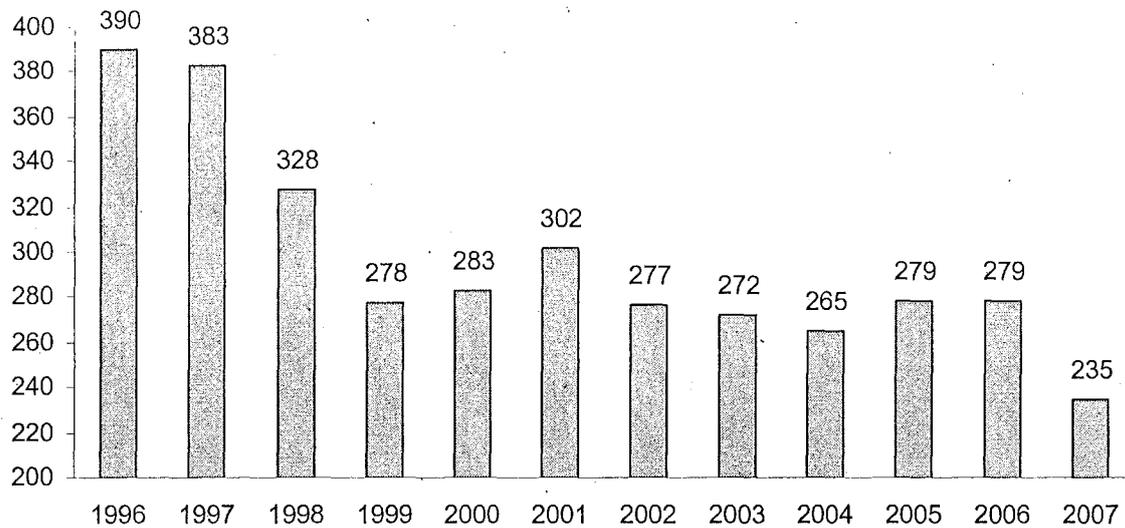
### Minnesota Auto Theft Statistics 1996-2007



The number of auto thefts decreased 32% from 1996-2007.

Source: Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

### Auto Theft Rates per 100,000 1996-2007



Auto theft rates have decreased 40% from 1996-2007.

Source: Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

**Auto Thefts in Major Counties and Cities in Minnesota  
1996 - 2007**

	1996	2007	%Change 1996- 2007
Anoka County	950	731	-23.0%
Coon Rapids	173	116	-33.0%
Fridley	145	148	2.0%
Dakota County	849	502	-41.0%
Burnsville	227	100	-56.0%
W. St. Paul	110	69	-37.3%
Hennepin County	7,674	4,644	-39.5%
Bloomington	396	180	-54.6%
Brooklyn Park	230	323	40.4%
Minneapolis	5,560	3,176	-43.8%
Olmsted Co. (Rochester)	145	168	15.8%
Ramsey County	3,278	2,755	-16.0%
Maplewood	168	185	10.0%
Roseville	130	126	-3.0%
St. Paul	2,638	2,076	-21.4%
St. Louis County	583	377	-35.4%
Duluth	398	227	-43.0%
Stearns Co. (St. Cloud )	206	125	-39.4%
Washington County	329	357	8.5%

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; or the entire vehicle as scrap metal for cash.

According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), the following list ranks the ten most stolen vehicles in Minnesota in 2007.

**Rank Year – Make – Model**

- 1 1995 Honda Civic \*
- 2 1994 Honda Accord
- 3 1991 Toyota Camry
- 4 1993 Chevrolet Full Size C/K 1500 Pickup
- 5 1995 Oldsmobile Cutlass
- 6 1995 Acura Integra
- 7 1995 Ford Taurus
- 8 1994 Dodge Caravan
- 9 1995 Saturn SI
- 10 1998 Jeep Cherokee/Grand Cherokee

Auto Theft grantees report the following trend and profile information in their applications and quarterly reports:

### **OFFENSE PROFILES & 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.
- Increased incidents where the perpetrator is a friend or a relative who took the vehicle without permission.
- “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.
- Thefts involving low dollar vehicles, \$3,000 or less, that are salvaged at local salvage yards. Minnesota licensed salvage operators are frequently associated with known auto thieves, and have been identified as locations where low value stolen vehicles are brought and salvaged.

## OFFENDER PROFILES

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 "joy rider".
- 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, 2007 through June 30, 2009. Funded projects include seven law enforcement agencies, five county attorney offices, two criminal justice agencies, and four 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 seven county attorney offices over the 14 month period of July 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

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

### **Law Enforcement Statistics:**

- Number of Vehicles reported stolen: 8,026
- Number of vehicles recovered: 6,696
- Number of vehicles processed for evidence: 1,821
- Number of vehicle theft investigations initiated: 3,787
- Number of vehicle theft arrests: 1,147
- Number of non auto theft related arrests generated by auto theft grant activities: 167

### **Law Enforcement Methods:**

- The latest law enforcement method for this grant period is the use of license plate scanners/readers. License plate readers use infrared light to illuminate a license plate, infrared offers the advantage of working well in dark conditions. A high speed camera

takes a photograph of the license plate. The photograph is analyzed using software and the images are converted into digital letters and numbers. The resulting string of letters and numbers is then compared with the law enforcement database of stolen vehicles and license plates. When a match is found, an alert is provided and law enforcement officers respond accordingly. When used on a patrol vehicle, some readers can scan up to 1,000 license plates in an hour. License plate readers are comprised of software installed in the patrol vehicles' computer and connected to the vehicle mounted cameras which are designed for license plate scanning/recognition. Scanned plates can be compared to listings of "vehicles of interest" associated with any license plate in any law enforcement database

One of the major advantages to using license plate readers is that they are a very cost effective way to combat vehicle theft that does not require hiring additional police officers; in addition the likelihood of recovering stolen vehicles increases tremendously.

- Jail interviews of known suspects and associates. Best use of time and resources. High success rate for recovery and charging.

## PROSECUTION

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.

Metro-area auto theft prosecutors as well as a representative from the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) meet quarterly to share information about defendants with cases in multiple counties, caseloads, procedures and techniques, and trends they are seeing in their jurisdictions.

### Prosecution Statistics

▪ Number of cases referred:	
Vehicle Theft Only – Adult	1,291
Vehicle Theft Only – Juvenile	737*
Vehicle Theft with related charges – Adult	367
Vehicle Theft with related Charges -	111*
Juvenile	
▪ Number of cases charged	1,629
▪ Number of convictions	919
▪ Number of defendants:	
Sent to Prison	167
Sent to Jail	364
Alternative Sentences	386**

\* 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 are case examples reported to OJP by prosecution and law enforcement grantees:

- Many of the investigations in Anoka County are generated from impromptu jail interviews with individuals who have had prior auto theft charges or are associates of auto theft suspects. Had the interview not happened, no investigation, recovery or charge would have taken place. This interview strategy began in December 2007 and has resulted in the recovery of an estimated \$260,000 in property during a ten month period. Ironically, the suspects are Anoka County residents but the property a majority of the time has been initially reported as stolen in a neighboring county and the recovered in yet a third county.  
Anoka County Attorney's Office
- An Anoka County car thief stole a dealership car in Duluth and abandoned it in Waverly (Wright County) then stole a dealership vehicle and abandoned that vehicle at a Bloomington car dealership. He then stole a vehicle that was used in a business burglary in Pine County and abandoned it at a Pine County dealership where a fourth vehicle was stolen. The suspect was arrested in Anoka County with the 4<sup>th</sup> stolen vehicle during the execution of a search warrant. This suspect then provided narcotics information as well as a tip involving an Anoka County residence whose \$30,000.00 skid loader and trailer was stolen by the Hell's Angels in Minneapolis that lead to a recovery of the equipment in Pine County, resulting in criminal charges on an Anoka County resident. Anoka County Sheriff's Office
- Prosecutors are seeing more cases of individuals taking cars from someone they know, be it a family member or an ex-significant other. These cases appear to be cut and dry in the beginning of the process but as time passes they become difficult to prosecute. Many family members change their mind as the process progresses and don't want to cooperate with the prosecution. Prosecutors try to deal with this up front by making contact with the victim and discussing the case with them, including what the potential consequences may be.  
South Metro County Attorney's Auto theft Prosecution Project
- Another trend prosecutors are seeing is in renting/stealing vehicles from car rental agencies and then in turn "re-renting" the vehicle to someone else. The perpetrators tell the person who is renting the vehicle from them that they work for the rental agency and can give them a better deal on the side. Although this is highly suspect to most people, several people have been duped by this scam.  
South Metro County Attorney's Auto theft Prosecution Project
- An adult defendant was charged with Motor Vehicle Theft after he was arrested on August 9, 2007, at a rental car lot in south Minneapolis. The defendant, a former employee of the car rental agency, was attempting to drive an SUV out of the lot when he was arrested. At the time of his August 9<sup>th</sup> arrest, the defendant had the rental agency's employee ID card in his possession. Since the defendant's employment was terminated on July 18, 2007, the defendant's ID card was swiped to remove from the rental car lot 11 vehicles, each of which subsequently has been recovered by the Minneapolis Police Department. The defendant said that he retained his employee ID and used it to steal rental cars from the lot. He admitted he stole each of the vehicles and rented each of the vehicles to drug users. He also stated he stole additional vehicles from the rental lot. The defendant agreed to help officers find the stolen vehicles. The defendant drove with officers through south

Minneapolis and pointed out six vehicles. The defendant then directed the officers to north Minneapolis where he pointed out two additional vehicles. The defendant was "RANted" (Risk Assessment Needs Triage) and found to qualify for the new model drug court. The defendant pled to four counts and is now in treatment.

Hennepin County Attorney's Office

- During three separate incidents, the defendant stole cars and took them to dealerships and attempted to trade them in for other vehicles. Defendant would ask to test drive a vehicle and never return the vehicle to the dealerships. Defendant had a lengthy criminal history with several previous auto theft/fleeing convictions. He was charged with theft over \$35,000 and sentenced to 60 months in prison.
- Hennepin County Attorney's Office
- During 2007, Ramsey County charged a high incidence of punched ignitions and filed/shaved key cases to facilitate stealing vehicles. Filed/shaved keys enable one to steal a car quickly and not draw attention at the time of the theft. Examples of such cases are defendant TBN who was arrested twice in less than 30 days stealing cars using filed down keys. In one case, defendant AD used the shank of a spoon having removed the circular end and then filed it down to use in the same manner as a filed down key to by-pass the ignition effectively. Another case was defendant CV who possessed porcelain spark plug chips which he admitted are used to break windows to facilitate thefts. He was caught manipulating the window of a car in order to gain access to the door locks to steal the car.
- Ramsey County Attorney's Office
- Two perpetrators were stealing Hondas from the parking lot at the Maplewood Mall and stripping the cars. This type of quick collaborative effort used by co-defendants results in many victims whose vehicles produce significant financial gain to the perpetrators by switching VINS to sell cars and parts. One case involved a VIN switch operation using a good title from a 1994 Chevrolet Suburban and stealing a 1993 Chevrolet Suburban in order to potentially produce income from the sale of a vehicle for pure profit.
- Ramsey County Attorney's Office
- The strength of the State's case increases dramatically when a vehicle is recovered quickly, as it was in a recent case against defendant BLG. The vehicle in question was reported stolen shortly after midnight. Mounds View Police stopped the vehicle for no license plate within one hour of the stolen report. BLG was the sole occupant of the vehicle and attempted to explain to the officer that he borrowed the car from a coworker. The officer however, observed that the steering column was punched, enabling BLG to drive the vehicle without a key. The immediate recovery of the vehicle, helped lead to BLG's speedy guilty plea.

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.

The concept of "Community Oriented Policing" has really made an impact in the implementation of the Central Auto Theft Program. As officers and probation have patrolled these neighborhoods, they have come to remember where each vehicle belongs as they consistently run license plates. Knowing who and what belongs where has made a huge difference in multiple aspects of policing. Officers continue to wave at the same kids they would see time after time as they drove by their various homes. Some citizens have developed relationships with the team members, and now approach them to tell the officers about crime that is taking place, trusting that they will take care of the problem. In addition, officers have observed the improved upkeep of the neighborhood in a consistent manner.

Pillsbury United Communities

### **Statewide Training and Media Campaign**

The Anti-Vehicle Crime Association of Minnesota (AVCAM) is a non-profit group composed of law enforcement, insurance companies, and the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) which provides training and assistance to law enforcement throughout Minnesota. AVCAM also provides information and educational materials to the public in an effort to reduce vehicle crimes.

For local law enforcement officers, AVCAM provides two-day vehicle theft investigation seminars; those attending these seminars receive instruction in:

- Vehicle Theft Motives and Techniques
- Vehicle Examination and Identification of Various Vehicles and Parts
- Vehicle theft Investigation Techniques
- Vehicle Insurance Fraud
- Investigative Resources
- The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB)
- Vehicle Titles, Title Histories, and other Related Documents
- Federal/State Laws and Case Decisions
- "Hands On" Experience in Examining/Identifying Various Vehicles.

In addition, one statewide seminar is held in the spring of each year featuring investigation professionals/guest speakers.

AVCAM launched its Statewide Media Campaign for 2006-2007 with the primary objective to provide vehicle theft prevention information and to raise awareness of the HEAT (Help Eliminate Auto Theft) line (1-800-359-HEAT).

These objectives were accomplished through a variety of media outlets including:

- A billboard was placed at the intersection of Snelling & Como during the State Fair to remind fair goers to lock their car and take their keys.
- The State Patrol was given packs of baseball-like cards noting the top five vehicles stolen in Minnesota; the cards were handed out by Troopers during the State Fair.

- AVCAM tips were seen in 262 newspapers on twelve different weeks. Most of the papers were weekly and community publications, but there were plenty of daily newspapers as well.
- A mailing of two different lenticular (3D) full color image posters were mailed to law enforcement agencies, colleges and universities, malls, parking ramps, and major businesses across the state for display.
- Two radio commercials were produced and on the air in 80 radio stations across Minnesota. Almost 300 radio stations received a news story about vehicle theft prevention as well as the news story script and a sound bite from AVCAM. Spots were aired in the morning and afternoon drives during news reports.

AVCAM Viewer

### **AUTO THEFT PREVENTION 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 2007, there was a clearance rate of 17% for motor vehicle theft; at the national level the rate was 12.6%.

While results have been significant over the past eleven 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 eleven years programs are using results to identify "what works," and best practices are now being employed throughout the state.



Report prepared by

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**GRANT RECIPIENTS**  
**July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2009**

<b>Grant Recipient</b>	<b>Type of Program</b>	<b>Award</b>
Anoka & Washington County Attorney's Offices	Prosecution	\$252,729
Anoka County Sheriff's Office	Law Enforcement	\$160,000
Anti-Vehicle Crime Association of Minnesota (AVCAM)	Statewide Training	\$31,170
Anti-Vehicle Crime Association of Minnesota (AVCAM)	Statewide Media	\$175,000
Bemidji Police Dept.& Beltrami County Sheriff 's Office	Law Enforcement	\$300,000
Bloomington Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$81,650
Brooklyn Center Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$155,611
Dakota County Attorney's Office (South Metro ATP Task Force – Dakota, Carver and Scott Counties)	Prosecution	\$281,953
District Two Community Council	Community	\$31,170
Hennepin County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	\$300,000
Minneapolis Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$375,000
MN Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Science Lab	Criminal Justice	\$299,404
MN Financial Crimes Task Force	Criminal Justice	\$209,375
Pillsbury United Communities	Community	\$99,092
Ramsey County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	\$490,000
Saint Paul Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$250,000
		<b>\$3,492,154.00</b>