Auto Theft Prevention
Grant Program

Report to the State of Minnesota Governor and Legislature
January 2010

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
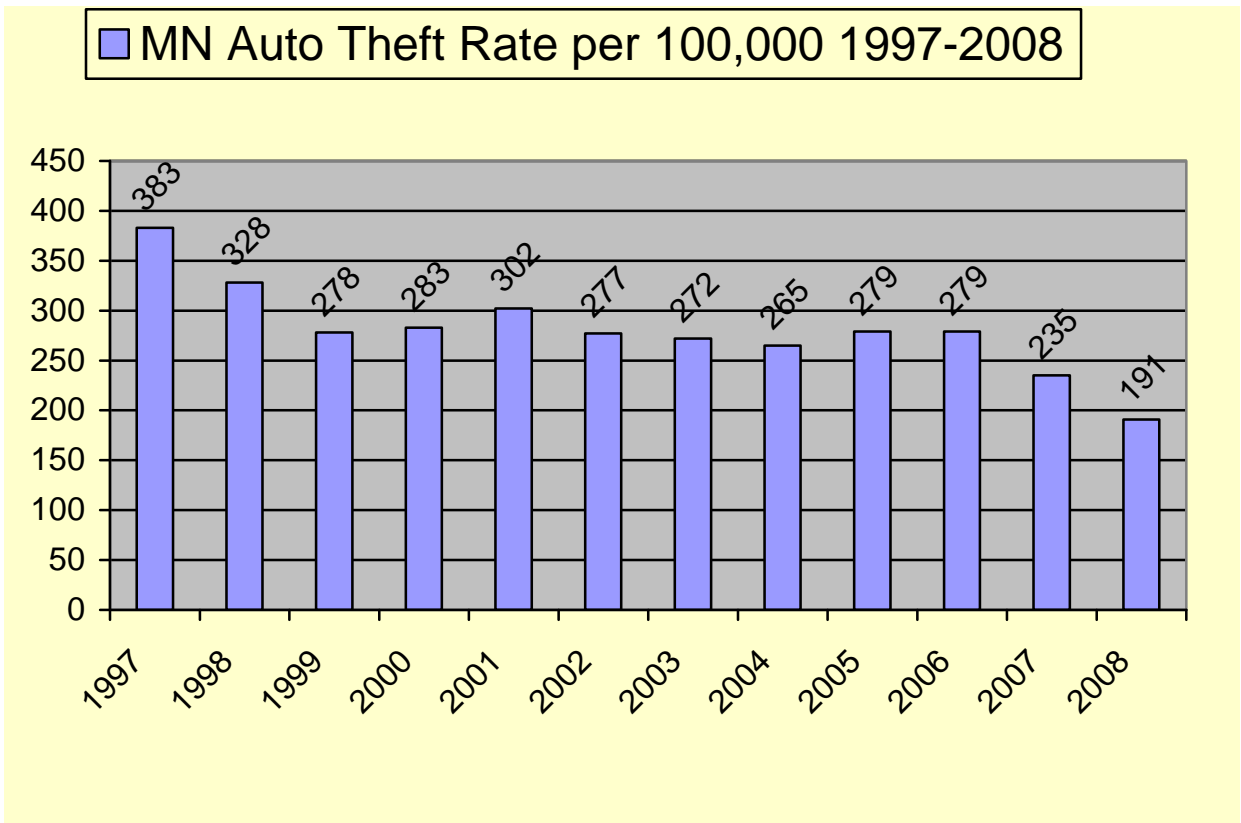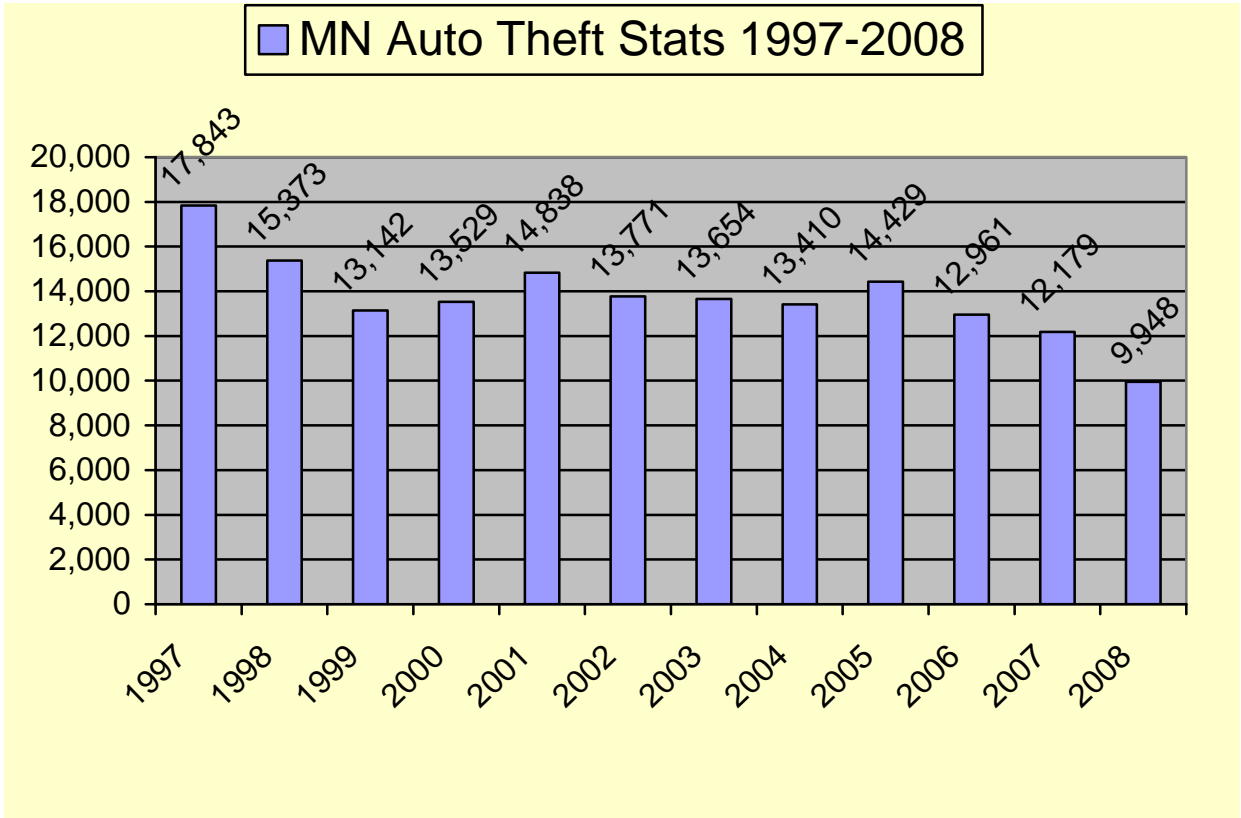
Program Background

In 1986 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 and is currently administered by the Department of Commerce Insurance Fraud Prevention Division.

Extent of Auto Theft in Minnesota

In 2008, the number of actual motor vehicle thefts reported in Minnesota was 9,948, a decrease of 18 percent from 2008. Motor vehicle thefts in 2008 represented 7 percent of the total of property crimes, a crime rate of 191 per 100,000 residents, and an average of 27 per day. The average dollar loss per motor vehicle theft was $3,949; motor vehicle theft was 24 percent of property crimes in Minnesota.

Overall, Minnesota continues to demonstrate an effective strategy to counter motor vehicle theft. Based on the 2008 Uniform Crime Report by the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA), the following graphs show the progress against Motor Vehicle Theft in Minnesota.

MN Auto Theft Stats 1997-2008

Year	Thefts
1997	17,843
1998	15,373
1999	13,142
2000	13,529
2001	14,838
2002	13,771
2003	13,654
2004	13,410
2005	14,429
2006	12,961
2007	12,179
2008	9,948

MN Auto Theft Rate per 100,000 1997-2008

Year	Rate
1997	383
1998	328
1999	278
2000	283
2001	302
2002	277
2003	272
2004	265
2005	279
2006	279
2007	235
2008	191

Although vehicle theft is primarily a crime of opportunity, perpetrators often favor certain makes and models. Thieves target a wide range of popular passenger vehicles, often seeking parts from older models for sale on the black market; or the entire vehicle for scrap metal or cash.

According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), the following lists the ten most stolen vehicles in Minnesota in 2008:

Minnesota

Rank	Vehicle	Year
1	Honda Civic	1995
2	Honda Accord	1994
3	Acura Integra	1995
4	Toyota Camry	1991
5	Dodge Caravan	1995
6	Oldsmobile Cutlass	1995
7	Ford Taurus	1995
8	Ford F150 Pickup	1997
9	Ford Explorer	2002
10	Buick Century	1994

Types of Trends in Thefts and Enforcement

- An increased number of cases charged involved perpetrators who were at least fifty years old, which is different from the typical perpetrator who is usually in his twenties or thirties. These offenders typically did not claim they had permission to use the vehicle.

- Increased association of motor vehicle theft and drug use.

- Thefts of opportunity due to owner leaving keys in vehicle, often with the vehicle running.

- Increased use of bait cars from the top list of stolen vehicles.

- Adult and juvenile males continue to be the vast majority of perpetrators of vehicle theft.

- Agencies continue to distribute "The Club" auto theft prevention device to victims of auto theft.

- A licensed auto dealer was identified as a chop shop and drug trafficker.

- A license salvage dealer was identified as a chop shop and drug trafficker.

- Proactive jailhouse interviews of known auto thieves have resulted in the recovery of stolen vehicles and charges for other crimes.

- Many cases are worked in collaboration/participation of outside agencies sharing information and resources.

- Organized auto theft rings are associated with active viable gangs.

Profile of Perpetrators

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

- Perpetrators who need 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 offender 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 will steal a vehicle, drive it somewhere, drop it off, and steal another vehicle and so on.

- Perpetrators 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 transfer or cutting up of the vehicle.

- An organized group of individuals led by "habitual perpetrators" 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 offender 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" and/or affiliated with a gang or gang initiation.

- Majority of perpetrators continue to be young males with criminal histories.

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; 4) address automobile theft that is perpetrated as part of a criminal enterprise.

Applications may be submitted for the following types of projects:

- Training (criminal justice, citizen and business, etc…)

- Public Education (public meetings, literature, public service announcements, neighborhood and business watch promotions, etc…)

- Programs designed to improve or expand the resources of existing auto theft prevention, investigation, apprehension, or prosecution activities.

- Multi-Jurisdictional projects combining the resources of different agencies in the task force approach to combat auto theft.

- Long-term specialized training to further the expertise of auto theft investigations or prosecutors.

Program Results

The Auto Theft Prevention grants were funded for the 24 month period of July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2011. Funded projects include six Law Enforcement agencies; four County Attorney Offices; four non-profit organizations; and one criminal justice agency. 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 form report reporting agencies.

Law Enforcement

The placing of specially trained law enforcement officers in the field to focus on motor vehicle theft is the most effective method of reducing thefts.

Law Enforcement Statistics:

DOCUMENTATION OF SERVICE	THIS PERIOD (7/1/08-6/30/09)
1. NUMBER OF VEHICLES REPORTED STOLEN	4836
2. NUMBER OF VEHICLES RECOVERED:	3844
a. NUMBER RECOVERED WITH DAMAGE	1967
b. NUMBER RECOVERED WITHOUT DAMAGE	1906
3. NUMBER OF RECOVERED VEHICLES PROCESSED FOR EVIDENCE	1268
4. AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME FROM THEFT REPORT TO RECOVERY	174
5. NUMBER OF VEHICLE THEFT INVESTIGATIONS INITIATED	2845
6. NUMBER OF VEHICLE THEFT ARREST:	704
a. NUMBER OF ADULTS	554
b. NUMBER OF JUVENILES	147
7. NUMBER OF NON-AUTO THEFT RELATED ARRESTS GENERATED BY AUTO THEFT GRANT ACTIVITIES	180
8. (OPTIONAL) BAIT VEHICLE:	
a. NUMBER OF VEHICLE DEPLOYMENT DAYS	1165
b. NUMBER OF ACTIVATIONS	73
c. NUMBER STOLEN	27
d. NUMBER OF ARRESTS	62

Law Enforcement Methods:

Jail interviews of known suspects and associates are a good use of time and resources and yield a high success rate of recovery and charges.

Mobile and stationary LPR's (License Plate Reader) are a cost effective tool to combat vehicle theft without requiring additional hiring of officers.

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 representatives 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.

County Attorney Offices have assigned prosecutors to motor vehicle theft prosecution; added Community Outreach Specialist who make presentation to driver education students, senior centers, and make video presentations that are distributed in the community.

Prosecution Statistics:

DOCUMENTATION OF SERVICES	THIS PERIOD (7/1/08-6/30/09)
1. NUMBER OF CASES REFERRED:	1175
a. VEHICLE THEFT ONLY (ADULT)	611
b. VEHICLE THEFT ONLY (JUVENILE)	384
c. VEHICLE THEFT WITH RELATED CHARGES (ADULT)	141
d. VEHICLE THEFT WITH RELATED CHARGES (JUVENILES)	39
2. NUMBER OF CASES CHARGED	790
3. NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS	445
4. NUMBER OF CONVICTED DEFENDANTS:	382
a. SENT TO PRISON	40
b. SEND TO JAIL	199
c. ALTERNATIVE SENTENCES	143
5. AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME FROM CHARGING TO DISPOSTION	219

Cases

Anoka County charged five Asian men for taking vehicles in the parking lot of the Northtown Mall. None of the men were residents of Anoka County. These men had stolen, three late model Hondas by punching the ignition. The defendants were caught through video surveillance in a high theft volume parking lot.

A car thief stole a vehicle from a dealership in Duluth and abandoned it in Waverly (Wright County), then stole another vehicle from a dealership and abandoned it at a Bloomington dealership. He then stole another vehicle and used it in a business burglary in Pine County, abandoning the vehicle at a Pine County dealership from where he stole his fourth vehicle. The suspect was finally arrested in Anoka with the stolen vehicle during the execution of a search warrant. This suspect then provided a tip that led the recovery of a skid loader, stolen by the Hell's Angels, which resulted in criminal charges against an Anoka County resident.

Minneapolis Police Department assisted Anoka County Sheriff's Office with an undercover operation targeting a suspect who had stolen a truck in Minneapolis and scrapped it in Anoka County. The operation was code named "Operation Precious Metals" and included officers from the 2nd Precinct Directed Patrol Unit. Parts from the stolen truck were recovered and the suspect was apprehended.

Bemidji Police Department has worked closely with the Red Lake Police Department and BCA on several auto theft cases involving vehicle theft where the stolen vehicles were sold to a steel recycling business because of the high price per pound for steel.
In many of these cases the suspect is known or related to the victim.

St Paul Police Department arrested a suspect using a bait car. The information the suspect provided led to the identification of another equally active suspect. Both were Meth addicts and responsible for 50-60 auto thefts per month in the Metro area.

A 2008 Nissan Rogue was stolen from a wedding event in Shakopee. The vehicle was recovered a month later parked on a local Shakopee street. Three suspects were identified in this case.

Community Auto Theft Prevention

District 2 Community Council:

District 2 Community Council activities included the dissemination of materials at eight block club meetings. The materials included theft reduction alerts and articles from the local newspaper which were mailed to 11,000 homes.

The council collaborates with St Paul Police Department to address auto theft break-in's with community out-reach to block leaders in areas experiencing high incidents of auto theft.

Pillsbury United Communities:

Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) activities include saturation details; focused attention on known chop shops; public education; Community Response Team (CRT); and officer training.

Perpetrators are increasingly using violence and weapons to steal autos for use in criminal enterprises such as gun and drug running, or feeding chop shops. Minneapolis Police Department is acting as the lead agency in this effort, with PUC as the community outreach arm, to reduce the level of crime in the Central area.

__Statewide Training and Media Campaign__

AVCAM Training:

Anti-Vehicle Crime Association of Minnesota (AVCAM) is a non profit organization formed to prevent vehicle crime through the Auto Theft Prevention Program. Members come from law enforcement agencies, insurance companies, and community organizations interested in preventing vehicle crime.

AVCAM Training conducted four, two-day training seminars for law enforcement and assistant county attorneys. The seminars covered techniques for stealing/disposing of stolen vehicles; VIN's; statutes, and case law; prosecuting vehicle theft; insurance fraud; chops shops; resources; and vehicle documents.

The program funds were used for the physical location of the training seminars and for the instructors.

AVCAM Media:

AVCAM Media promoted the Help Eliminate Auto Theft (HEAT) line. The line is a toll free tip line (800-359-4328) offering rewards for information leading to the recovery of cars, car parts, and the conviction of auto theft.

The phone is answered by the Minnesota State Patrol dispatch in Marshall and given to the Special Agent with the NICB. After review, the information is passed to local Law Enforcement.

The HEAT line is promoted by billboards, radio, and ads in Auto Trader magazine.

Auto Theft Prevention Program Impact

It continues to be difficult to measure the specific impact of the Auto Theft Prevention Program. However, since the programs inception there has been a clear decrease in the incidence of motor vehicle theft in the state.

In 2008, the number of actual motor vehicle thefts reported in Minnesota was 9,948, a decrease of 18 percent from 2007 as reported by the BCA in their Uniform Crime Report.

This trend is also reflected nationally in the FBI's 2008 Crime in the United States Report showing a decrease of 12.7% in the incidents of motor vehicle theft for the same time period.

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Thank you

Thank you to the Grantee's and their agencies in the transition of reporting from Office Justice Programs to the Department of Commerce. We appreciate your patience in adjusting to new requirements and the work your agencies do in combating vehicle theft in the State of Minnesota.

I also extend a special thank you to the Office of Justice Programs, Jeri Boisvert and Jocelyn Van Knight for their guidance and assistance in the transition to the Department of Commerce.

Appendix

Grant Recipients
July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2011

Applicant	Type of Program	Biennium Award
Fridley Police Department*	Law Enforcement	$210,634
Ramsey County Attorney	Prosecution	$469,508
Brooklyn Center Police Department	Law Enforcement	$154,538
Minneapolis Police Department	Law Enforcement	$296,830
Hennepin County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	$249,946
Bloomington Police Department	Law Enforcement	$205,752
Shakopee Police Department*	Law Enforcement	$31,828
BCA Forensic Science Service	Criminal Justice	$170,269
Bemidji Police Department	Law Enforcement	$252,000
Duluth Police Department*	Law Enforcement	$151,850
Washington County Sheriff's Office*	Law Enforcement	$16,754
District 2 Community Council	Community	$28,562
Saint Paul Police Department	Law Enforcement	$242,896
Anoka County Attorney	Prosecution	$256,604
AVCAM - Training	Statewide Training	$58,582
AVCAM - Media	Statewide Media	$144,000
Minnesota State Patrol*	Law Enforcement	$94,371
Maplewood Police Department*	Law Enforcement	$25,078

$3,060,000