

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HEAT'S HOT HINTS FOR HOLIDAY SHOPPING

HEAT® (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts) offers safety tips for year's busiest shopping season

LIVONIA, MI (15 November 2000) — With the busiest shopping season of the year around the corner, shoppers are at increased risk of falling victim to criminals lying in wait, ready to snatch up holiday packages and automobiles. According to HEAT® (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts), a statewide auto theft prevention program which operates a toll-free hotline (800-242-HEAT®), there are several ways to avoid becoming a statistic.

"During the holiday season, people become distracted, rushing around, in an attempt to complete their gift shopping," said Terri Miller, director of the HEAT® program. "Criminals are opportunists, and hurried, unsuspecting shoppers become the perfect prey."

The combination of a strong economy and solid retail sales the first 10 months of the year has retailers projecting large crowds, according to the Michigan Retailers Association and Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago in its Michigan Retail Index.

Last month's MRA index found that while 62 percent of retailers expect a 2 percent drop in sales from last season -- projections still average a gain of 9 percent for the holiday season.

"The economy is still fundamentally sound, which contributes to the increase in shopping traffic," said MRA Chief Executive Officer Larry Meyer.

The increase in shopping traffic is precisely what concerns HEAT®. According to Miller, large crowds, longer lines, impatience and frustration can result in shoppers taking unnecessary risks,

such as leaving a vehicle running or tossing packages in a vehicle, in plain view, both of which are an invitation for criminals.

To help holiday shoppers stay safe, HEAT® has provided its list of *Hot Hints for Safe Holiday Shopping* and is asking citizens to read it carefully before going out this holiday season.

HEAT® rewards tip callers with up to \$1,000 if their tip leads to the arrest and binding over for a trial of a suspected car thief; up to \$10,000 if the tip results in the arrest and binding over for trial of suspected theft ring members and/or chop shop operators. HEAT® also rewards \$2,000 for information leading to the issuance of a warrant for a carjacking suspect.

Since its inception in 1985, HEAT® has recovered 2,929 vehicles valued at \$33,646,139, arrested over 2,387 suspects and awarded \$2,221,095 to callers.

###

HEAT's® Top Ten Holiday Safety Tips

1. Park in well-lit areas, near sidewalks or walkways. Avoid parking near dumpsters or large vans or trucks. These obstacles decrease ability to clearly see the space around your vehicle, where thieves or carjackers could be hiding.
2. Consider using the valet service if you are out shopping alone at night at a mall. It costs, but your life is worth more. Leave only the ignition key with no I.D. (Keep your registration and proof of insurance in your wallet).
3. If you are shopping late at night and your car is parked in the lot, ask the store clerk if it is possible for store security to escort you to your car. Most stores will happily comply with the request.
4. If you leave purchases or wrapped gifts in the car, place them in the trunk and out of view.
5. Even if burdened down with packages, try to keep one hand free with the ignition key in hand. Look around and inside the car before getting in.

6. If threatened by a carjacker with a gun or other weapon, GIVE UP THE CAR. DON'T ARGUE. A life is more important than any car.
7. If you are carjacked or witness a carjacking, try to remember what the carjacker looked like -- sex, height, build, race, age, hair, eye color and special features.
8. When driving in traffic, always leave room between you and the car in front, so that if you sense trouble, you can maneuver quickly and get away easily.
9. Report the crime immediately to the police.
10. If you witness an auto theft or carjacking, call the police immediately. If you have any information regarding an auto theft or carjacking, call the HEAT[®] tip reward line at 800-242-HEAT[®]. Or, if you have an Ameritech Cellular phone, dial " * HEAT[®]" to be automatically connected with HEAT[®] law enforcement officials.

#