

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUNSHINE GIVES THIEVES GREATER OPPORTUNITY TO STRIKE Help Eliminate Auto Thefts and the Down River Auto Theft Team offer safety tips to protect against auto theft

Livonia, Mich. (09 July 2002) – With warm weather finally making its way to Michigan, people all over the state are heading outside to soak up the sun and take part in summer activities. But thieves are more active in the warmer months also – looking to strike when people relax their usual common sense and auto safety standards. Whether it's leaving the car running while going into the store, or forgetting to roll up the windows, people enjoying the sun are often specifically targeted by opportunistic car thieves.

Help Eliminate Auto Thefts (HEAT[®]), a statewide auto theft prevention program, which operates a confidential, toll-free tip reward hotline (**1-800-242-HEAT**) is teaming up with the Down River Auto Theft Prevention Team (DRATT), to remind people to be cautious while having fun in the sun.

Follow HEAT[®]'s tips for a safe summer:

- Remember to lock your doors, take your keys from the ignition and don't leave the keys on the seat – all common sense rules that drivers often forget when warm weather hits.
- Don't tempt thieves! Never leave your running vehicle unattended and put away valuables – such as laptops and cell phones – even when just running into a store.
- A second layer of auto protection is recommended – such as audible alarms, steering wheel locks, and theft deterrent decals – to discourage auto thieves.
- Report what you know about auto theft to your local police department and HEAT[®]'s confidential tip-reward line, 1-800-242-HEAT.

HEAT[®] also recommends attending a VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) etching fair. VIN etching involves lightly stenciling the vehicle's identification number onto all the glass surfaces, which makes the car much less attractive to thieves since all windows would have to be replaced to make it valuable on the street.

By getting VIN etchings on your windows, your vehicle automatically becomes unappealing to thieves, according to Lt. Mike Lewis of DRATT. "Although nearly invisible to the untrained eye, we've had so much success preventing auto theft using this simple method, and now with VIN etching fairs being held statewide, it has become a very quick and convenient way for people to guard themselves against theft," explained Lewis.

Don't get burned by auto thieves this summer. Check out one of these VIN etching fair dates, sponsored by AAA Michigan, HEAT® and the Auto Theft Prevention Authority (ATPA). All dates are at local AAA Michigan branches and are open to the public. For more information on upcoming fairs throughout Michigan, please visit www.miatpa.org.

Upcoming dates in the Detroit area –

- **July 24 – Monroe** (305 S. Telegraph)
- **August 21 – Birmingham** (34802 Woodward Ave.)

Upcoming date in Flint –

- **June 28 – Flint** (G5009 W. Bristol Rd.)

Upcoming dates in Western Michigan –

- **August 1 – Grand Rapids** (6305 Kenowa Ave.)
- **August 20 – Holland** (587 E. 8th St.)
- **August 27 – Kalamazoo** (2015 W. Crosstown Parkway)

“Now that summer is finally here, everyone wants to get outside and enjoy the weather,” said Terri Miller, director of HEAT®. “Although thieves are looking to steal as the temperatures rise, we can continue the declining trend of auto theft in Michigan if we follow HEAT®’s simple auto safety tips and take preventative measures such as VIN etching, to protect ourselves while we’re out and about enjoying the sunshine,” said Miller.

Tipsters can call the HEAT® hotline, **1-800-242-HEAT**, to confidentially report auto theft related information, including insurance fraud. Tipsters are rewarded up to \$1,000 if their tip leads to the arrest and prosecution of a suspected car thief or a person suspected of auto theft related insurance fraud. Rewards up to \$10,000 are issued if a tip results in the arrest and binding over for trial of a suspected theft ring and/or chop shop operators. HEAT® also rewards \$2,000 for information leading to the issuance of a warrant for a carjacking suspect.

HEAT®’s hotline is monitored by the Michigan State Police and funded by Michigan auto insurance companies. Since its inception in 1985, HEAT® has awarded more than \$2.4 million to tip callers. During that period, the HEAT® tip line has received 5,738 calls leading to the arrest of 2,537 suspects and has recovered 3,107 vehicles and other stolen property valued at more than \$36 million.

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