

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**HEAT[®] BURNS THIEVES WITH HOT HOLIDAY TIPS
FOR THE LAST MINUTE SHOPPING RUSH**

HEAT[®] (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts) Urges Christmas Shoppers to Put Safety First

LIVONIA, MI (19 December, 2001) – As harried shoppers rush to find last minute gifts in the final days before Christmas, they are placing themselves at an increased risk of becoming a potential target of thieves. By following HEAT[®]'s Hot Holiday Tips, shoppers can avoid falling prey to criminals who view the flood of holiday traffic as an opportunity to steal automobiles as well as newly bought presents. For the past 16 years, HEAT[®] (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts), a statewide auto theft prevention program which operates a toll-free hotline (1-800-242-HEAT), has been working to keep Michigan's holiday shoppers from becoming a statistic.

"As Christmas nears, people become distracted by busy schedules and are preoccupied with all the gifts they need to purchase, and thieves are aware of this," said Terri Miller, HEAT[®] Director. "HEAT[®] reminds people to stay alert and avoid becoming a target, so everyone has a happy holiday season."

Even with the recent economic downturn, Michigan retailers are projecting an overall 6% increase in holiday sales this season, according to the Michigan Retailers Association (MRA). "Despite the lackluster economy, Michigan retailers see bright spots that can make this a better season than some are forecasting," said Larry Meyer, chairman and CEO of MRA.

The last minute surge in holiday shopping is exactly what concerns the HEAT[®] program. According to Miller, the long shopping lines, large crowds, and consumer impatience can lead to people taking unnecessary risks, such as parking in unlit areas, leaving an unattended vehicle running or putting packages in plain view.

To help shoppers have an enjoyable and safe holiday shopping experience, HEAT[®] has provided a list of Hot Holiday Tips and is asking Michigan citizens to familiarize themselves with these suggestions before braving the shopping crowds this season.

People with information on auto theft are urged to call HEAT[®]'s confidential tip-reward line, 1-800-242-HEAT. HEAT[®] rewards tip callers with up to \$1,000 if their tip leads to the arrest and binding over for 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. Since its inception in 1985, HEAT[®] has recovered 3,045 vehicles valued at \$35,186,473, arrested over 2,483 suspects and awarded \$2,349,420 to callers.

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**For more information or to schedule interviews, please contact Caroline Jeffs
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HEAT®'s Hot 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 shopping center. 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 1-800-242-HEAT®.

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