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HEAT URGES HOLIDAY SHOPPERS TO PUT SAFETY FIRST WITH AUTO THEFT PREVENTION TIPS

LIVONIA, Mich. (Nov. 10, 2004) – As people get wrapped up in the hustle of the holidays, Help Eliminate Auto Thefts (HEAT) aims to keep safety top-of-mind among preoccupied shoppers who are particularly vulnerable this season.

“Thieves look forward to the holidays when people are distracted and made careless by hectic schedules and long lists of tasks,” said Terri Miller, director of HEAT. “Shoppers often take unnecessary risks such as leaving their vehicles running, leaving them unlocked and stowing gifts and shopping bags in open view instead of in the trunk.”

To help ensure the 2004 holiday shopping season stays safe for Michigan residents, HEAT recommends the following precautions:

1. **Park in well-lit areas, near sidewalks or walkways.** Avoid parking near dumpsters or large vans or trucks. These obstacles decrease your ability to see the space around your vehicle clearly, where thieves or carjackers could be hiding.
2. **Consider using the valet service** if you are out at a shopping center alone at night. It may cost money, but your safety is worth more. Leave the valet only the ignition key with no I.D. Keep your registration and proof of insurance in your wallet.
3. **Place gifts in the trunk and out of view.** Use a trash bag, blanket or cardboard box to camouflage packages in the back of a van or SUV.
4. **Try to keep one hand free** with the other hand holding your car keys as you approach or leave your vehicle so you can maneuver if you encounter a thief or carjacker.
5. **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.
6. **If you witness an auto theft or carjacking, call the police immediately.** If you have any information regarding an auto theft, insurance fraud or carjacking, call the HEAT tip reward line at **1-800-242-HEAT**.

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About HEAT

Anyone with information on auto theft, carjacking, chop shops and auto insurance fraud in Michigan is encouraged to call the HEAT hotline, **1-800-242-HEAT**, to provide a confidential report. HEAT works with Michigan law enforcement agencies to follow up on tips. Tipsters are awarded 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 of up to \$10,000 are issued if a tip results in the arrest and binding over for trial of a suspected theft ring or chop shop operators. HEAT rewards up to \$2,000 for information leading to the issuance of a warrant for a carjacking suspect. The HEAT hotline is monitored by the Michigan State Police and funded by Michigan's auto insurance companies.

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Editor's Note:

To schedule an interview with a Terri Miller, contact Elizabeth Weigandt at 248.362.4200, ext 244.