

***HEAT® Looks at Far Reaching Effects of Economic Downturn –
Impending Recession May Result in Higher Crime and Fraud Rates***

Tighter travel restrictions – and wallets – will increase importance of the auto

LIVONIA, MI (24 October 2001) – An impending recession may mean a rise in crime rates, if history is any indication. Auto theft rates peaked nationally in 1991, coinciding with the last national recession, and studies have shown that crime rates typically rise in times of economic decline and unemployment. Help Eliminate Auto Thefts (HEAT®) is calling attention to this fact and cautioning car owners to take precautions in protecting their autos from theft, in light of our worsening economy.

HEAT® also cautions that auto insurance fraud rates may rise as well, as the economy worsens. “With a slower economy and increased unemployment, people may be tempted to commit insurance fraud, as a way to bring in money or avoid car payments they can no longer afford,” said Terri Miller, Director of HEAT®.

A recent study by the Insurance Information Association of Michigan (IIAM) shows that 26% of Michigan citizens know someone who has committed insurance fraud, while only one in eight has reported the crime. Anyone with information on auto insurance fraud is encouraged to call 1-800-242 HEAT, a confidential tip-reward line. HEAT® offers rewards up to \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest of someone committing insurance fraud.

Owners can protect their cars from theft by following simple safety tips, including locking their doors and arming their vehicles with anti-theft devices, such as an alarm. “Protecting yourself from auto theft does not have to be a high priced investment. The goal is to make your vehicle unattractive to thieves,” counseled Miller. “If citizens work together to prevent and detect auto theft, we can protect our neighborhoods.”

Some HEAT® tips to keep your autos safe:

- Remember to lock your doors, remove your keys from the ignition and roll up your windows when your car is parked.

- A second layer of auto protection is recommended – such as audible alarms, steering wheel locks, theft deterrent decals and window etching – to discourage auto thieves.
- Park in a well-lighted, high visibility area and never leave your running vehicle unattended.
- Don't leave your valuables, such as cellular phones and planners, on the car seat. Store these items out of view.
- Report what you know about auto theft to your local police department and HEAT[®]'s confidential tip-reward line, **1-800-242-HEAT**.

Far reaching effects may also be felt as a result of the terrorist attacks on America and the retaliation by the United States. Tighter travel restrictions and fear of flying will make the automobile even more important in everyday life. A survey by the National Business Travel Association (NBTA), released on September 19, indicated that 65% of businesses surveyed would increase car use on short-haul trips.

"Studies indicate that more and more, Americans are going to be relying on their cars for business and pleasure travel," said Miller. "The auto will increase in value – both personally and financially – and again, citizens will have to work together to prevent and detect auto theft. Now, more than ever, citizens need to fight back against auto theft in their communities. Anyone with information regarding auto theft is urged to call 1-800-242-HEAT."

HEAT[®] operates a toll free confidential tip line, 1-800-242-HEAT, for citizens to report auto theft related information. HEAT[®] offers rewards up to \$10,000 for information leading to the arrest of auto thieves, people suspected of auto insurance fraud, carjackers and the break up of chop shops and theft rings. Since its inception in 1985, HEAT[®] has awarded more than \$2.2 million to tip callers. During that period, the HEAT[®] tip line has received 5,529 calls leading to the arrest of 2,459 suspects and has recovered 3,012 vehicles valued at more than \$34.8 million.