

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY

NATIONAL AUTO THEFT RATES UP IN 2000, BUT MICHIGAN SHOWS STATEWIDE DECREASE

Help Eliminate Auto Thefts Director Terri Miller Available for Interviews on Study Released by the National Insurance Crime Bureau

DETROIT, MI (12 December 2001) — In a study released yesterday by the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), auto theft rates increased 1.2 percent nationally from 1999 to 2000. However, Michigan showed a statewide 1.9 percent decrease in auto theft rates, according to the 2000 FBI Uniform Crime Report (UCR). The NICB used statistics from the 2000 FBI UCR in their study.

Terri Miller, director of Help Eliminate Auto Thefts (HEAT[®]), a statewide Michigan auto theft prevention program is available for interviews on the report. "Whenever there is a downturn in the economy and an increase in unemployment, we need to be prepared for an increase in crime rates", said Miller. "There is also always an increased risk in Detroit, with its proximity to the Canadian border, which obviously makes it easier for thieves to get stolen cars out of the country."

Miller credits the decrease in Michigan's auto theft rates to good teamwork. "Organizations such as HEAT[®] have been working alongside law enforcement to fight auto theft in our communities," she said. HEAT[®] offers up to \$10,000 for confidential tips to 1-800-242-HEAT that lead to the arrest and prosecution of an auto thief, theft ring or chop shop.

The NICB report also listed the top ten most commonly stolen vehicles in the United States, including the Toyota Camry, Honda Accord, Oldsmobile Cutlass, Honda Civic, Jeep Cherokee, Chevrolet Full Size C/K Pick-Up, Toyota Corolla, Chevrolet Caprice, Ford Taurus and the Ford F150 Pick-Up.

Miller said that often times, older cars such as the Oldsmobile Cutlass are stolen because their parts are interchangeable and valuable. "All the different models of the Cutlass, from 1983 to 1987, have compatible parts. For example, a fender for a 1983 Cutlass would not look out of place on a 1987 model," said Miller. "Plus, the manufacturers are not making the parts anymore, so that increases their value greatly."

The older models of the Oldsmobile Cutlass also have easily replaced vehicle identification numbers (VIN), allowing thieves to replace the important identification device. "The older cars do not have the new Rosette Rivets on them, which means it is more difficult for police officers to identify them as stolen at a casual glance."

HEAT[®] operates a toll free confidential tip line, 1-800-242-HEAT, for citizens to report auto theft related information. Since its inception in 1985, HEAT[®] has awarded more than \$2.3 million to tip callers. During that period, the HEAT[®] tip line has received 5,582 calls leading to the arrest of 2,483 suspects and has recovered 3,045 vehicles valued at more than \$35 million.

Help Eliminate Auto Thefts Auto Theft Prevention and Safety Tips

HEAT® auto theft prevention tips include:

- 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, near sidewalks or walkways. Avoid parking near dumpsters, large vans or trucks. These obstacles decrease ability to clearly see the space around your vehicle, where thieves or carjackers could be hiding.
- Don't leave your valuables, such as cellular phones, on the car seat. Store these items out of view.

During the holiday shopping season, HEAT® recommends the following additional safety tips:

- 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 ID and keep your registration and proof of insurance in your wallet.
- If you are shopping late at night and your car is parked in the lot, ask store security to escort you to your car.
- If you leave purchases or wrapped gifts in the car, place them in the trunk and out of view.
- 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.

If approached by a thief or carjacker, HEAT® says:

- 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.
- 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.
- When driving in traffic, always leave room between you and the car ahead of you, so that if you sense trouble, you can maneuver quickly and get away easily.

And remember...

- Always report any crime immediately to the police.
- 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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