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HEAT PROVIDES TIPS TO PREVENT USED CAR FRAUD **Tips Show Michigan Consumers How to Safely Buy and Sell a Used Vehicle**

Livonia, Mich. (Aug. 23, 2004) – Michigan consumers become vulnerable to fraud every time they sell a used vehicle on their own, or buy one from an individual, according to HEAT (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts). To combat this crime, HEAT provides safety tips to protect both the buyer and seller from fraudulent behavior.

“Beware of the shiny Corvette selling for rock bottom price on the lawn of someone you don’t know,” said Terri Miller, director of HEAT. “Auto thieves take advantage of unsuspecting consumers in two ways: buying cars with bogus checks or selling stolen cars with fake titles. Consumers should be aware that not only are they vulnerable to losing their property or money, they can be held liable for unwittingly participating in these activities.”

In order to protect consumers, services are available through the Michigan Secretary of State that allow buyers to research vehicle history information using the VIN number on used cars.

Tips to avoid becoming a victim:

- **Avoid selling a vehicle on Friday evening.** Because banks are closed on the weekend, Friday transactions give the thief time to make a getaway before you get a chance to go to the bank and attempt to cash his or her check.
- **Get two forms of identification.** Just because the buyer has a certified check, it doesn’t mean it’s valid. Call the issuing bank to verify.
- **Obtain contact information.** Ask for a home or work phone number, along with the address of the purchaser, before handing over the title. Be wary if they only use a cell phone.
- **Be skeptical of bargain prices.** If you find a vehicle listed under what it’s worth, approach with healthy skepticism and research the history of the vehicle.
- **Beware of out-of-state transactions.** Never walk away without a title. Completing the transaction at a Secretary of State during office hours can help reduce the possibility of fraud because they can immediately verify license and title information for legitimacy.

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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.

Editor's Note:

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

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