

# Car thieves are often busy on job in August

Drive-offs happen if cars left idling, area police caution

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Lansing State Journal

Keep an eye on that car.

August is traditionally one of the most common months for car thefts statewide, with higher-than-normal numbers reported, officials say.

More vehicles were stolen in August 2005 than any other month, according to statistics provided by HEAT (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts), a Michigan nonprofit that works with law enforcement agencies and residents to fight vehicle theft.

Terri Miller, the group's director, said the common mistake of leaving an idling car in the warm summer months fuels some thefts.

"It's one of the ultimate crimes of convenience," said DeWitt Township police Lt. Brian Traub.

Statewide, since 2002, August has been one of the top four months for vehicle thefts, Miller said.

However, Lansing police officials say auto theft is a problem year-round. Lt. Bruce Ferguson said so far this summer, they have not seen a spike.

Overall, Lansing police saw a 15 percent increase in auto thefts last year, after about a 12 percent decline the previous year. There were 469 motor vehicle

## MOST POPULAR CARS TO STEAL

The top 10 most stolen cars in Michigan in 2006:

- |                            |                        |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. 2005 Dodge Ram          | 6. 1997 Ford Taurus    |
| 2. 2004 Dodge Ram          | 7. 1999 Dodge Intrepid |
| 3. 2005 Dodge Durango      | 8. 1996 Dodge Caravan  |
| 4. 2003 Dodge Ram          | 9. 1999 Ford Taurus    |
| 5. 2005 Pontiac Grand Prix | 10. 1994 Dodge Caravan |

Source: Michigan Automobile Theft Prevention Authority

## Report auto thefts

Anyone with information about an auto theft, carjacking, a chop shop or auto insurance fraud in Michigan is urged to call: (800) 242-HEAT (4328) or go to [www.1800242HEAT.com](http://www.1800242HEAT.com). A live operator will answer the confidential phone tip line 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Rewards of up to \$10,000 are available if a tip leads to the arrest and prosecution of a suspect.

thefts in 2006, up from 408 in 2005, according to the department's annual report. In 2004, the department said there were 489 cases of vehicle theft.

Ferguson also pointed to the problem of drive-offs, which happen when people leave their car running either to heat it up in winter or cool it down in summer.

More drive-offs occur in winter, he said, when it is easier to notice that a vehicle's engine is running.

Traub said DeWitt Township police saw a string of vehicle thefts in winter 2006 and spring this year. Thieves were stealing vehicles as they were warming

up in the morning, he said.

Most of the stolen vehicles were found within a day, he said, sometimes with nothing missing. He added that no one has been charged in the thefts, which police are continuing to investigate.

One of the best tools to prevent drive-offs is a remote starter, experts said, which starts a vehicle's engine with the push of a button.

Because no key is used, vehicles can't be put in gear or the steering wheel locks.

Having a remote starter coupled with some kind of anti-theft device likely would lead to a discount in insurance rates, said AAA Michigan spokeswoman Nancy Cain.

"But check with your insurance agent," Cain said.

Lansing police also are seeing more vehicles being loaned out in exchange for drugs, Ferguson said.

If those vehicles are not returned to their owners, they are reported as stolen.

"They're using the police department to recover their vehicles," he said.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or [kgrasha@lsj.com](mailto:kgrasha@lsj.com).

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## **| NONPROFIT HELPS FIGHT AUTO THEFTS IN MICHIGAN**

■ Since the inception in 1985 of a statewide nonprofit funded by the insurance industry — HEAT (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts) — vehicle thefts in Michigan have declined 33 percent. The program gives out rewards for information leading to the arrest and prosecution of people involved in auto theft, as well as auto-related identity theft, carjacking and chop shops.

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