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H.E.A.T. PROVIDES IMPORTANT TIPS TO KEEP SHOPPERS SAFE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

LIVONIA, Mich. (Nov. 17, 2008) – With the height of the holiday shopping season fast approaching, Help Eliminate Auto Thefts (H.E.A.T.) aims to keep safety top-of-mind among busy shoppers. It is easy for consumers to be preoccupied with endless errands this time of year, and as a result, find themselves unknowingly and unnecessarily vulnerable to theft or injury.

“During the holiday season, shoppers often take unnecessary risks such as leaving their vehicles unlocked or stowing gifts and shopping bags in open view instead of in the trunk,” said Terri Miller, director of H.E.A.T. “Thieves look forward to the holidays when people are distracted and made careless by hectic schedules, countless tasks and mile-long shopping lists, so we encourage everyone to please remember to keep up their guard.”

To help ensure the 2008 holiday shopping season is a safe one for Michigan residents, H.E.A.T. recommends that shoppers take the following precautions:

- **Park in well-lit areas, near sidewalks or walkways.** Avoid parking near dumpsters or large vans or trucks, as these obstacles decrease your ability to see the space surrounding your vehicle. **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.
- **Stay alert to your surroundings.** You could become a target if you are distracted by a cell phone, hunting for your keys or are fumbling with a big pile of packages.
- **Consider using the valet service** if you are out at a shopping center alone at night. The small fee is worth your safety. Remember to leave the valet only the ignition key with no I.D. Always keep your registration and proof of insurance in your wallet.
- **Place gifts in the trunk and out of view.** If need be, use a trash bag, blanket or cardboard box to camouflage packages in the back of a car, van or SUV.
- **Move your car** to another space in the lot if you unload gifts. Don't tempt a thief who will watch you leave your purchases and go back into the mall or store.
- **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 vehicle.
- **If you witness an auto theft or carjacking, call the police immediately.** If you have any information regarding auto theft, insurance fraud or carjacking call the 24/7 H.E.A.T. tip reward line at **1-800-242-H.E.A.T.**

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About H.E.A.T.

Since its inception in 1985, H.E.A.T. tips have led to the recovery of nearly \$50 million in stolen property and the arrests of more than 3,200 suspects involved in auto theft rings, chop shops, carjackings and fraudulent car thefts, among other auto-related crimes. H.E.A.T. has paid more than \$3.4 million in tipster rewards over the last 23 years. Anyone with information on auto theft, carjacking, chop shops, auto theft-related identity theft and auto insurance fraud in Michigan is encouraged to call the H.E.A.T. 24/7 tip line and speak to a live operator at 1-800-242-HEAT, or log on to www.1800242HEAT.com to provide a confidential report.

H.E.A.T. works with Michigan law enforcement agencies to follow up on tips. Tipsters are awarded up to \$1,000 if the tip leads to the arrest and prosecution of a suspected car thief or a person suspected of auto theft-related insurance fraud or identity theft. 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. H.E.A.T. rewards \$2,000 for information leading to the issuance of a warrant for a carjacking suspect.

The H.E.A.T. tip line 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 Terri Miller,
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