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CONTACT: Laura Daien  
517-827-1117  
[ldaien@baileypr.com](mailto:ldaien@baileypr.com)

## H.E.A.T. WARNS DRIVERS, AUTO DEALERS OF CONTINUING TREND IN UNCONVENTIONAL AUTO CRIMES

*Criminals Get More Creative as Vehicles Become Harder to Steal and "Traditional" Auto Theft Continues to Decline*

**Livonia, Mich.** (April 27, 2010) – For a second consecutive year, following the release of the Automobile Theft Prevention Authority annual report, H.E.A.T. (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts) is cautioning Michigan drivers, and now auto dealers as well, to be aware of the growing trend in unconventional auto theft-related crimes.

“With increased vehicle security features, and the continuing success of Michigan law enforcement’s hard-working auto theft units, crooks are turning to new schemes and scams to separate innocent drivers from their property,” said Terri Miller, director of H.E.A.T. “Even auto dealerships are now being targeted by desperate thieves looking for new ways to secure stolen vehicles.”

H.E.A.T. is cautioning dealers and their sales teams to be aware of the growing trend in key-theft schemes, which allow thieves to return to lots after hours and steal vehicles. Auto dealers are encouraged to always authenticate a potential buyer’s identification before offering a test drive, note the vehicle a “buyer” arrives in, when possible, and always examine keys carefully (testing the key fob) when they are returned from test drives.

“Of course, it’s not just auto dealers that need to be educated on thieves’ new plots,” Miller continued. “Michigan drivers also need to be aware of the evolving trend in unconventional auto theft-related crimes, and take necessary precautions to protect themselves and their property, both what they currently own and in the buying and selling process. If the deal on a used car seems ‘too good to be true,’ it’s likely stolen.”

Some of the unconventional auto theft-related crimes on the rise in Michigan include:

- *Component Theft:* Vehicle parts, especially tires, rims, airbags and navigation systems, are being stolen and sold to crooked dealers and repair shops.
- *Online Fraud:* Thieves are turning to “open market” sites and online communities like Craigslist.com as an easy outlet for selling or trading stolen vehicles.
- *Vehicle Re-Tagging/Cloning:* Thieves obtain legitimate VIN numbers from cars matching the year, make, model and color of a stolen vehicle and swap or duplicate the identifying digits.

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- *Check fraud:* Buyers of vehicles from individuals offer fake “certified checks” to purchase a vehicle and insist that the transaction is done on an evening or weekend when the check can’t be immediately verified.

Anyone with information on suspicious or criminal auto theft-related activity in their community should contact the police department immediately, and then report the tip to H.E.A.T. at 1-800-242-HEAT or [www.1800242HEAT.com](http://www.1800242HEAT.com).

#### **About H.E.A.T.**

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. 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 up to \$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, contact  
Laura Daien at 517-827-1117 or [ldaien@baileypr.com](mailto:ldaien@baileypr.com).*