



Automobile Theft Prevention Program

2021

Minnesota Department of Commerce

Mission

Commerce protects all Minnesotans in their everyday financial transactions by investigating and evaluating services and advocating that they be fair, accessible and affordable.

With You Every Day

Wherever you are in Minnesota, the Department of Commerce is with you every day. Whether you're filling up on gas, purchasing a home, working to reduce energy consumption or rebuilding after a disaster—we are with you, no matter what.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce oversees more than 20 regulated industries, ensuring that Minnesota consumers are protected, and businesses are strong. Our mission is to protect the public interest, advocate for Minnesota consumers, ensure a strong, competitive and fair marketplace, strengthen the state's economic future and serve as a trusted public resource for consumers and businesses. Learn more at mn.gov/commerce

Pursuant to Minnesota Statute 3.197: This report cost approximately \$500.00 to prepare, including staff time.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
TRENDS	4
Automobile Theft	4
Carjacking	5
Theft of Catalytic Converters.....	5
GRANT AWARDS.....	6
General Grant	6
Public Awareness Grant.....	14
CATALYTIC CONVERTER MARKING PROGRAM.....	14
GRANT PROGRESS	15

INTRODUCTION

This report provides an update concerning funds spent pursuant to Minnesota Statutes §65B.84 (Auto Theft Prevention Program) and §325E.21 (Catalytic Converter Marking Pilot) and immediate related issues. These statutes have resulted in increased support and access to new technologies, innovative approaches, best practices and shared resources to help combat automobile theft across Minnesota. Some highlights, as detailed within this report, include:

- Catalytic converter theft deterrent efforts such as the catalytic converter marking program.
- Auto theft deterrent efforts such as public education efforts to reduce the likelihood of auto theft, with messaging centered on the fact that six out of ten vehicles are stolen with keys inside.
- Law enforcement training and equipment.
- Funding for investigator positions in Bemidji, Duluth, Edina, Hennepin County, Roseville, St. Cloud, Saint Paul and other areas across Minnesota.
- Youth accountability and diversion programs in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.
- Recognition of joint efforts by municipal, county, state and Tribal law enforcement and county attorney offices.

Due to the legislative deadline for this annual report, this preliminary report is intended to provide an overview of the efforts undertaken pursuant to the Minnesota Statutes §65B.84 and §325E.21. A more detailed analysis of 2021 auto theft trends, along with additional recommendations, will be provided in a supplementary report once the 2021 crime statistics become available in the summer of 2022.

TRENDS

Automobile Theft

According to the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), there were 13,662 motor vehicle thefts in Minnesota in 2020, compared to 11,410 in 2019 (19% increase). The actual number of auto thefts was likely higher, as the UCR only identifies cases where auto theft was the primary offense, thus instances of auto theft by carjacking, burglary and fraud are not reflected in those statistics. Final UCR statistics for 2021 will not be available until the summer of 2022. Information compiled through September 2021 show law enforcement agencies entered approximately 17% more stolen vehicles than during the same period of the prior year.

In addition to tracking the overall number of motor vehicle thefts occurring in a particular year, it is also important to consider the number of vehicles stolen in the context of the state's population. From 2012 through 2016, Minnesota experienced auto thefts rates of roughly 150 per 100,000 residents. Since 2016, the rate of motor vehicle thefts per 100,000 residents in Minnesota has increased dramatically. The 2020 auto theft rate in Minnesota was 250 per 100,000 residents. The national average was 246 per 100,000 residents. This was the first time Minnesota exceeded the national average since these statistics were first reported in 1985.

Carjacking

Carjacking is not a specific criminal offense, rather it is the crime of robbery when a motor vehicle is taken. As a result, law enforcement agencies do not report information to the Minnesota BCA on the number of carjackings, thus it is difficult to give a truly accurate accounting of the number of carjacking that occur in Minnesota.

Law enforcement and media reports indicate the number of carjacking have increased over 2020 and increased dramatically over 2019, and that the increase has been primarily concentrated in Ramsey and Hennepin counties.

Theft of Catalytic Converters

Like carjacking, law enforcement does not report a separate statistic of this offense. Some law enforcement agencies began more closely tracking this data in 2020. Discussions with law enforcement agencies in early 2021 revealed the rate of these catalytic converter thefts was about double that of 2020. Although the value of the precious metals inside the catalytic converters has dropped, the theft problem has not diminished. This specific offense is particularly attractive because catalytic converters are easy to steal and generally have no identifying numbers on them which makes it extremely difficult for law enforcement officers to prove that a suspect is in possession of stolen property. In addition, there continues to be a high demand for used catalytic converters by both legitimate and illegitimate buyers, which make it easier for a criminal to sell a stolen converter. An update on the catalytic converter theft prevention program is described below.

GRANT AWARDS

The Automobile Theft Prevention Grant Board recommended to the Commerce Commissioner that all but two applications for the 2022 – 2023 grant period be funded. One was incomplete and the other was a duplicate of a Dedicated Investigator Grant application. The awards prioritized areas of the state where automobile theft is most problematic and to support Greater Minnesota law enforcement.

The approved requests continue to fund strategies employed in other areas of the country such as vertical prosecution and specialized equipment. There were new program requests the Board hopes will result in an overall reduction in automobile theft including:

- A Youth Accountability Program partnering the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office, Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office and the African American Leadership Council.
- A Youth Diversion Project through the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office.
- Funding investigator positions in the Hennepin County and Ramsey County Attorney’s Offices to follow up on automobile theft cases.
- Law enforcement training and equipment intended to help reduce or eliminate the need for lengthy police vehicle pursuits of stolen vehicles.
- Resources and equipment used to deter and investigate the theft of catalytic converters, such as a catalytic converter marking program.
- The establishment of a statewide overtime fund, which allows for the payment of overtime to any law enforcement agency (with prior approval by the Board) to investigate auto theft related crimes. The overtime funds are reimbursed through the City of Minneapolis. The purpose of the statewide overtime fund is to allow any law enforcement agency experiencing auto theft-related offenses to apply for reimbursement of overtime expenditures. This model allows all law enforcement agencies access to overtime funds – not just those who were awarded funds during the normal grant application process. A total of \$300,000 was awarded for the biennium.
- Scholarships and travel reimbursement for law enforcement investigators and prosecutors to attend the North Central Auto Theft Investigators Conference. This opportunity includes dedicated slots for Greater Minnesota agencies and Tribal Law Enforcement agencies.

General Grant

For fiscal years 2022 – 2023 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2023) the Minnesota Automobile Theft Prevention Program (ATPP) awarded general grants to support auto theft prevention activities totaling \$4,565,169.43. The funds were awarded to fifteen law enforcement agencies, four county attorney

offices and three non-law enforcement organizations, including the Ramsey County Youth Project, Minnesota Automobile Dealers Association and the North Central Regional Chapter of the International Association of Auto Theft Investigators. The General Auto Theft Grants were awarded to:

Law Enforcement Agencies

As of the date of this report being drafted, not all law enforcement agencies had reported their 2021 auto theft statistics. A comprehensive analysis of those statistics will be included in the 2021 ATPP supplemental report, which is expected to be completed in the summer of 2022.

Anoka County Joint Law Enforcement Council

The Anoka County Joint Law Enforcement Council (ACJLEC) was awarded \$290,773.04. The ACJLEC is comprised of eleven law enforcement agencies in Anoka County, including the Anoka County Sheriff's Office, Anoka P.D., Blaine P.D., Centennial Lakes P.D., Columbia Heights P.D., Coon Rapids P.D., Fridley P.D., Lino Lakes P.D., Ramsey P.D., Spring Lake Park P.D. and Saint Francis P.D. Grant dollars fund an analyst on an overtime basis to review and spot auto theft trends in the county. Information gathered is then shared with officers and investigators to target problem areas. Additionally, funding provides money that is used for overtime related to auto theft investigations, special auto theft prevention details, catalytic converter marking events, surveillance equipment and training. The ACJLEC received 679 stolen vehicle reports and recovered 444 stolen vehicles in 2021.

Bloomington Police Department

The Bloomington Police Department was awarded \$84,336 to support its Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPR's) to locate stolen vehicles. The department has five mobile units and several fixed units placed in strategic locations around the city, and thus far has reported good success with the recovery of stolen vehicles using ALPR's. In 2021, the ALPR's accounted for 61 stolen vehicle recoveries with 53 arrests. Bloomington received 320 stolen vehicle reports and it recovered 223 stolen vehicles in 2021.

Brooklyn Center Police Department

The Brooklyn Center Police Department was awarded \$34,200. The award was to be used to purchase equipment such as night vision binoculars, tracking devices, stop sticks and a relatively new device known as Star Chase. Star Chase is a deployable GPS tracking system that mounts to the front of a squad car and can launch a small device that adheres to a fleeing vehicle. The system potentially reduces the need for police to engage in lengthy pursuits of stolen motor vehicles because officers can track the real-time location of a fleeing vehicle. The department purchased four of the units, but they are awaiting installation and training on their use.

Eden Prairie Police Department

The Eden Prairie Police Department was awarded \$19,885 to support a portable ALPR program. Eden Prairie Police reported a 152% increase in auto thefts from 2018 to 2020. The department deployed the system in the last quarter of 2021 and has reported a total of 201,695 license plates were read by its ALPR, with 91 stolen vehicles and 130 stolen license plates being identified. During the last six months of 2021, Eden Prairie received 33 stolen vehicle reports and they recovered 48 stolen vehicles. Eden Prairie was not a grant recipient during the previous biennium, so the reported statistics are limited to July through December 2021.

Edina Police Department

The Edina Police Department was awarded \$65,742 to purchase night vision equipment and three ALPR's. For a period of July through December 2021, Edina received 55 stolen vehicle reports along with one carjacking and one attempted carjacking. Edina recovered 25 stolen vehicles for the same period. Edina reports that several of the stolen vehicles were unoccupied, with keys left in the vehicle. Edina received a partial award to fund a dedicated auto theft investigator through the Dedicated Auto Theft Investigator Grant Program. The investigator has been promoting anti-theft strategies through social media, community meetings and presentations. Edina was not a grant recipient during the previous biennium, so the reported statistics are limited to July through December 2021.

Hennepin County Sheriff's Office

The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office was awarded \$160,800. The department's award was to fund a full-time analyst position. The Sheriff's Office also received funding for two full-time dedicated auto theft investigators through the Dedicated Auto Theft Investigator Grant. These three positions look for trends and support auto theft investigations throughout Hennepin County. The Sheriff's Office also coordinates bi-weekly collaboration meetings with law enforcement agencies within the county to gather and share intelligence.

Hibbing Police Department

The Hibbing Police Department was awarded \$28,424 to train its officers in the Pursuit Intervention Technique (PIT), implement a PIT policy and outfit two squad cars for performing PIT. Hibbing expressed a goal of quickly ending pursuits by using the PIT maneuver. Grant funds allowed two officers to be trained as PIT and Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC) instructors. Those officers are then able to train other police officer in the use of PIT. From July through December 2021, Hibbing received 13 stolen vehicle reports and recovered 4 stolen vehicles. Hibbing was not a grant recipient during the previous biennium, so the reported statistics are limited to July through December 2021.

Maplewood Police Department

The Maplewood Police Department was awarded \$34,685.64. Maplewood purchased the Star Chase GPS tracking system, with a goal of reducing the need for prolonged high speed vehicle pursuits. Maplewood received 240 stolen vehicle reports and recovered 192 stolen vehicles in 2021. Maplewood also received funding for one full-time dedicated auto theft investigator through the Dedicated Auto Theft Investigator Grant. That investigator attempted to process every recovered stolen automobile for evidence. Assigning a single investigator in has shown great promise in Maplewood, as the clearance rate for stolen vehicles cases has changed from approximately 7% prior to the program to more than 20% under the program.

Minneapolis Police Department

The Minneapolis Police Department was awarded \$1,298,160.80. This award was to fund personnel, overtime, equipment, bait car program expenses, training and to serve as the fiscal agent for the \$300,000 Statewide Auto Theft Overtime Fund. The funded positions are responsible for deployment and maintenance of the bait car, conducting forensic science examinations of stolen vehicles and performing accounting functions related to the Statewide Overtime Fund.

The bait car coordinator reported the shortage of officers in the department has been a significant obstacle to the department's overall efforts to combat auto theft. Minneapolis reported most vehicles are stolen with keys inside and carjackings remain a significant issue.

Minneapolis employed several strategies to combat auto theft, including include bait car deployment, directed patrol in high theft areas with an ALPR, processing of recovered stolen vehicles for evidence and conducting detailed investigations. Minneapolis recovered 128 vehicles using the ALPR. Minneapolis received 4,566 stolen vehicles reports and 655 carjackings/robberies in 2021. During the same year, Minneapolis recovered 4,253 stolen vehicles. Minneapolis reported 290 adult arrests and 35 juvenile arrests related to auto theft.

Minnetonka Police Department

The Minnetonka Police Department was awarded \$68,046 for the purchase of mobile ALPR units. Using a combination of grant and city funds, Minnetonka purchased five mobile ALPR's and three patrol car mounted units. The units have been deployed at strategic locations throughout the city. Minnetonka reported most of the vehicles stolen are taken with the keys, and many of their stolen vehicles were used to facilitate crimes in other jurisdictions.

Minnesota State Patrol

The Minnesota State Patrol was awarded \$5,800 to purchase toolkits for its Vehicle Crime Unit (VCU) investigators. VCU investigators frequently come across vehicles with altered or cloned Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) plates. The toolkits are used to disassemble certain parts of the automobile

to search for hidden VIN's indicating the true and actual VIN. To date, four tool kits have been deployed across the state.

Ramsey County Sheriff's Office

The Ramsey County Sheriff's Office was awarded \$79,840. The award was to be used to purchase three ALPR's, three Star Chase devices and for overtime to conduct auto theft investigations. Ramsey County provides contracted services for seven municipalities within the county, and supports auto theft investigations, including carjackings, throughout the county. The Ramsey County Sheriff's Office was not a grant recipient in the previous biennium. Automobile thefts in Ramsey County increased from 3,024 in 2019 to 3,574 in 2020.

Roseville Police Department

The Roseville Police Department was awarded \$64,636.20. The award was to fund the purchase of equipment such as night vision binoculars, surveillance camera, FLIR monocular, stop sticks and several Star Chase devices. Roseville reported a 43% increase of auto theft incidents from 2019 to 2020. They received 104 auto theft reports from July through December 2021 and recovered 116 during that time. Roseville experienced a 3700% increase of catalytic converter thefts from 2016 to 2020. In 2021, Roseville held two catalytic converter marking events using marking labels provided through the Catalytic Converter Marking Pilot Program. Roseville indicated its investigators have experienced a dramatic caseload increase over the last year, which has been a significant challenge to overcome. Roseville indicated that an increasing rate of auto theft crimes has been a challenge for its limited staff.

Saint Paul Police Department

The Saint Paul Police Department was awarded \$218,433. The award partially funds an auto theft analyst, auto theft training for investigators and overtime to support auto theft investigations. Saint Paul also received funding for two full-time dedicated auto theft investigators through the Dedicated Auto Theft Investigator Grant. In 2021, Saint Paul reports that its 17 ALPR units accounted for the recovery of 299 stolen vehicle resulting in 29 arrests. Saint Paul received 2,649 stolen vehicle reports and recovered 2,845 stolen vehicles in 2021.

South St. Paul Police Department

The South St. Paul Police Department was awarded \$59,276 for training and ALPR units. In addition, South St. Paul received an award to fund a part-time auto theft investigator through the Dedicated Auto Theft Investigator Grant. South St. Paul reported that in 2021 its ALPR's read 94,591 license plates, hitting on 557 stolen vehicles. South St. Paul received 113 stolen vehicle reports and recovered 78 stolen vehicles in 2021.

COUNTY ATTORNEY OFFICES

As of the date of this report being drafted, the 2021 prosecution statistics were not finalized. A comprehensive analysis of those statistics will be included in the 2021 ATPP supplemental report, which is expected to be completed in the summer of 2022.

Anoka County Attorney's Office

The Anoka County Attorney's Office was awarded \$193,859 to fund one dedicated auto theft prosecutor. From 2019 to 2020, auto thefts in Anoka County were reported to have increased by 30%.

Hennepin County Attorney's Office

The Hennepin County Attorney's Office was \$548,424.25 to fund one dedicated adult prosecutor, one part-time juvenile prosecutor, one part-time paralegal and one part-time investigator. Also, \$30,000 of the total award is to be used to fund community youth diversion programs.

Ramsey County Attorney's Office

The Ramsey County Attorney's Office was awarded \$568,969.60 to fund one dedicated auto theft prosecutor, one auto theft investigator, one auto theft paralegal and training for those staff.

Washington County Attorney's Office

The Washington County Attorney's Office was awarded \$116,200 to fund one half-time auto theft prosecutor and to train staff.

Community / Business Organizations

The following organizations were awarded grant funds for the current biennium to support efforts to combat auto theft:

Minnesota Automobile Dealers Association

The Minnesota Automobile Dealers Association (MADA) was awarded \$99,999 to develop a catalytic converter marking program. MADA was to spend \$88,000 to purchase Cat Guard labels, which would then be distributed to Minnesota automobile dealers for installation on vehicles experiencing high catalytic converter theft rates.

North Central Regional Chapter – International Association of Auto Theft Investigators

The North Central Regional Chapter of IAATI, which is comprised of thirteen states and two Canadian provinces, was awarded \$24,750. The Chapter will hold its annual four-day training conference in

Bloomington, Minnesota in May 2023. The award is designed to allow Minnesota law enforcement investigators and prosecutors to attend the conference at a reduced cost.

Ramsey County Youth Project

The Ramsey County Youth Auto Theft Intervention Project was awarded \$499,929.60. This project, which is coordinated by the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, was designed to identify, address, and ultimately interrupt at-risk youth who are involved in auto theft-related activities. It utilizes a focused deterrence approach to combat youth involved in auto theft-related crimes. The project incorporates data, collaboration, and community-based responses. The program is comprised of prosecutors, law enforcement officers, social workers, and community members to identify and work with juveniles that are auto theft offenders. Alternatives to incarceration such as restorative justice remedies are used. The program is designed such that if the incentives and community connection do not change the behavior of the individuals participating in the project, then a traditional prosecution model kicks in.

Dedicated Auto Theft Investigator Grant

As mentioned in previous Auto Theft Prevention Program annual reports, Minnesota has experienced a lack of specialized auto theft investigators across all levels of law enforcement. Additionally, Minnesota lacks auto theft investigators who possess statewide jurisdiction to investigate cross-jurisdictional auto theft activities as well as organized criminal rings. To combat this, the Auto Theft Prevention Program offered a new grant opportunity for the 2022-2023 biennium. This grant was developed to fund Dedicated Auto Theft Investigators. The Board believes dedicated auto theft investigators, specialized training, required intelligence meetings, oversight, and coordination by the grant program manager will result in more efficient investigations of auto theft cases along with the investigation of more complex cases that have largely been ignored.

Agencies who applied for and were awarded this grant receive approximately \$100,000 on an annual basis to offset wages if they assign a full-time investigator to only work auto theft-related cases. To be eligible for a full-time investigator award, law enforcement agencies needed to have a combination of at least 250 vehicles reported stolen or recovered stolen vehicles within a year. Agencies not meeting that threshold were eligible to receive approximately \$12,000 on an annual basis in exchange for assigning all the auto theft cases to one investigator.

For fiscal years 2022 – 2023 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2023), the Minnesota Automobile Theft Prevention Program awarded dedicated auto theft investigator grants totaling \$2,560,480. Grants were awarded to fourteen law enforcement agencies, providing funding for twelve full-time investigators and four part-time investigators. The Dedicated Auto Theft Investigator Grants were awarded to:

AGENCY	#	INVESTIGATOR TYPE	GRANT AWARD
Bemidji PD	1	Part-Time	\$28,405
Brooklyn Center PD	1	Full-Time	\$203,905
Coon Rapids/Anoka PD	1	Full-Time	\$203,905
Duluth PD	1	Full-Time	\$204,405
Edina PD	1	Part-Time	\$27,905
Fridley/Spring Lake Park/Columbia Heights PD	1	Full-Time	\$203,905
Hennepin County Sheriff's Office	2	Full-Time	\$407,810
Maplewood PD	1	Full-Time	\$203,905
Mille Lacs County Sheriff's Office	1	Part-Time	\$28,405
Ramsey County Sheriff's Office	2	Full-Time	\$407,810
Roseville PD	1	Full-Time	\$203,905
Saint Cloud PD	1	Full-Time	\$204,405
Saint Paul PD	2	Full-Time	\$407,810
South St. Paul PD	1	Part-Time	\$27,905

Public Awareness Grant

In 2021, the Hennepin and Ramsey County Attorney's Offices partnered with the Commerce Department to help generate awareness on auto theft prevention. As the two largest county attorney offices in Minnesota, they see the highest number of auto theft-related cases in the state. Through that partnership, a public awareness campaign was designed with the message of: Park it. Lock it. Pocket. The campaign provided the public with tips to prevent auto theft, with much of the messaging centered on the fact that six out of ten vehicles are stolen with keys inside. The campaign was comprised of billboard and digital media. The Automobile Theft Prevention Program will offer a grant directed to further the messaging toward public awareness of preventing automobile theft. A significant contributing factor to vehicle theft in Minnesota is leaving the keys with the vehicle.

CATALYTIC CONVERTER MARKING PROGRAM

In June 2021, the Minnesota Legislature directed Commerce to create a plan for marking catalytic converters of vehicles the most at risk for theft. The law (Minn. Stat. § 325E.21 subd. 2) requires feedback from law enforcement, insurance companies and scrap metal dealers to identify the most at-risk vehicles and establish marking techniques to deter and prevent these thefts.

Law enforcement agencies were asked whether they track converter thefts by the make and model of the vehicle in which the converter was stolen from. Commerce learned that very few agencies collect that type of data. Information received from the Saint Paul Police Department and the Anoka County Sheriff's Office identified the following vehicles as the top vehicles in which catalytic converters have been stolen from in 2021: 1) Honda CRV, 2) Toyota Prius, 3) Hyundai Santa Fe, 4) Mitsubishi Eclipse and 5) Mitsubishi Outlander. These vehicles are consistent with national statistics.

Discussions with law enforcement officials from across the state revealed that one of the most significant challenges officers have when investigating this offense is proving a catalytic converter in the possession of a suspect is stolen property because a significant contributing factor to the rise of this type of theft is that, once it is removed from a vehicle, converters are virtually untraceable.

A survey was sent to 358 insurance carriers and 67 scrap metal dealers inquiring about the extent of the problem, the most targeted vehicles, and possible solutions to the problem. Only three insurance companies and nine scrap dealers provided responses. Other than one scrap dealer who recommended placing an identification number on all converters, no other marking solutions were suggested.

Commerce staff identified use of the CatGuard label as a preferred method of quickly and inexpensively marking catalytic converters in a manner that is permanent, does not require any specialized skill, tools

or training, and is immediately traceable by law enforcement. The CatGuard program has a reporting dashboard that allows the marking program manager to monitor the progress of label installations and review reports of stolen converters, allowing for a measure of the product's effectiveness. In November 2021, a "mini pilot" was approved to purchase approximately 1,200 labels at the cost of \$10,000. The labels were distributed to five law enforcement agencies across Minnesota in December 2021. Those law enforcement agencies are using a variety of methods to install labels, including installation by law enforcement personnel, installation at automobile service centers and installation by community groups.

Initial feedback provided to the program manager has revealed high public and law enforcement interest. In order to effectively determine if affixing a label to a catalytic converter is an effective way to deter thefts while at the same time being able to find a way to identify a stolen converter, the program needs a much larger number of labels on Minnesota vehicles. To label more catalytic converters, it is anticipated that a large number of marking labels will need to be purchased. Those labels will then be offered to the public in a way to combat the theft of catalytic converters most effectively. Additional information concerning status of the marking program will be included in the Auto Theft Prevention Program supplemental report when it is completed in the summer of 2022.

GRANT PROGRESS

As of the date of publication of this report, not all grantees have reported second quarter data for projects funded by the general auto theft prevention program. Commerce staff maintain regular contact with the grantees to assist with grant issues, advise on best practices, theft trends and attempt to coordinate the efforts of all grantees.

One law enforcement agency testing newer license plate reading technology has reported they have received 'hits' on a few stolen vehicles. However, the number of stolen vehicles identified have been much lower than anticipated. It is believed this is in part due to a trend employed by criminals to quickly remove license plates once they have stolen a vehicle.

With respect to the new Dedicated Auto Theft Investigator Grant, investigators working under the grant initially report that their ability to work only auto theft related cases is a more efficient and effective way to work and agencies have been able to clear more auto theft cases than in the past. Several of these investigators have identified some larger more coordinated auto theft rings. However, the large volume of auto thefts and the inability to receive assistance from other investigators has resulted in only a small amount of follow up on these cases.

Although the program was well advertised and most law enforcement administrators are aware of the opportunity, there were relatively few applications. Some of the areas with the most significant auto theft problems did not apply for the grant or applied for less than they qualified for. Administrators explained their reasons for not applying primarily related to a lack of law enforcement officers available to be assigned as dedicated auto theft investigator, the fact that auto theft is a 'property crime' rather than a 'person crime' means it is not as high of a priority and a general lack of staff to dedicate to the problem as required under the grant.

The newly created dedicated overtime fund allows for payments to be directed to law enforcement agencies that have identified an immediate auto theft problem, such as rampant thefts, chop shops or increased instances of carjacking. Although this opportunity exists for all law enforcement agencies, no agency has yet to apply to receive overtime funds to combat these crimes. One reason believed to be partially responsible for the lack of interest in the fund are the staffing shortages many agencies are currently experiencing. Staff shortages, which require many officers to work overtime just to ensure daily patrol shifts are covered, mean fewer officers are available, or willing, to work automobile theft overtime.

Learn more about the Commerce Fraud Bureau

The Commerce Fraud Bureau is a law enforcement agency within the Minnesota Department of Commerce charged with conducting criminal investigations involving insurance fraud. Criminal complaints and indictments stemming from CFB investigations are posted online. A criminal complaint is merely an accusation, and a defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

Commerce is here to help

If you have a question or concern about a possible scam or fraud, contact the Minnesota Department of Commerce's Consumer Services Center at consumer.protection@state.mn.us, 651-239-1600 or 800-657-3602.

Report prepared by

Minnesota Department of Commerce
Commerce Fraud Bureau
85 7th Place East, Suite 280
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101

Grace Arnold, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Commerce

Jonathan Ferris, Acting Director
Commerce Fraud Bureau

Joseph K. Boche, Special Agent and Automobile Theft Grant Prevention Program Manager
Commerce Fraud Bureau
