

A Profile of the DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force (BATTLE)



Prepared for
the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council

George Ryan, Governor
Sam Nolen, Chairman

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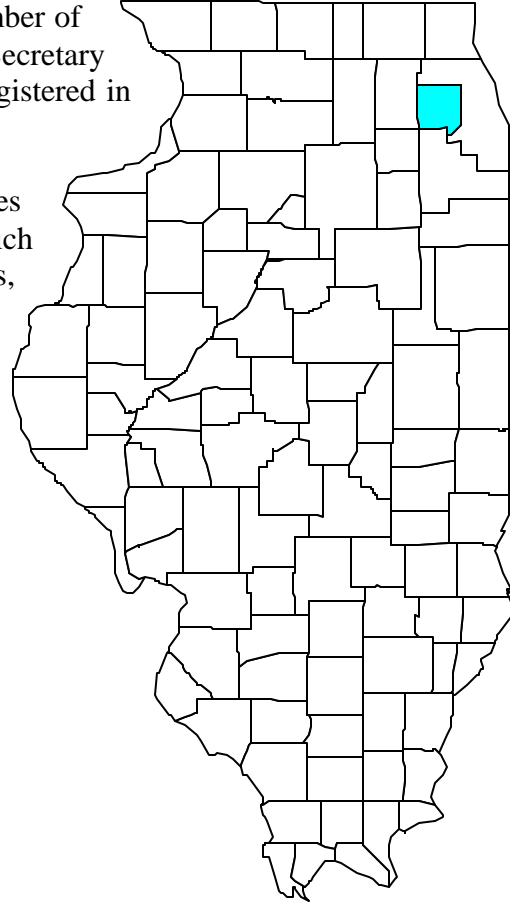
**ILLINOIS MOTOR VEHICLE
THEFT PREVENTION COUNCIL**

Introduction

The DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force, also known as BATTLE (Beat Auto Theft Through Law Enforcement), serves the County of DuPage, located in northeastern Illinois adjacent to Cook County. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, DuPage County had a 1999 population of 892,547, the second highest county population in the state.¹ Covering an area of 334 square miles, DuPage County ranks 87th among Illinois counties in terms of land area.² Combining these two measures, DuPage County has the second highest population density among Illinois' 102 counties.

DuPage County ranks second in the state for number of registered vehicles. According to the Illinois Secretary of State's Office, there were 822,310 vehicles registered in DuPage County in 1999.³

DuPage County is one of the five collar counties (DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will) which border Cook County. To provide comparisons, information specific to DuPage County will be compared to other collar counties.



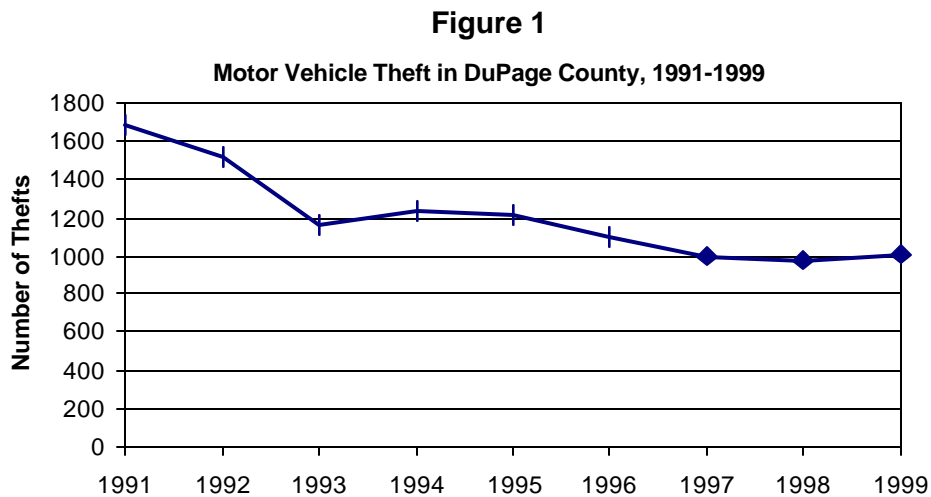
¹ United States Bureau of the Census. 2000. *County Population Estimates for July 1, 1999*.

² Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. 1997. *1996 Illinois Statistical Abstract*. Table 1-5.

³ State of Illinois, Office of the Secretary of State. 2000. *County Statistical Report for Motor Vehicle License Units and Transactions Received for 1999*.

Motor Vehicle Theft in DuPage County

In 1991, there were 1,686 motor vehicle thefts in DuPage County. By 1993, the number of thefts had dropped by 31 percent to 1,164. Over the next four years, the number of vehicle thefts dropped another 14 percent, from 1,164 thefts in 1993 to 999 thefts in 1997. Since 1997, the number of vehicle thefts in DuPage County has remained at around 1,000 each year. Motor vehicle theft in DuPage County has decreased at a greater rate than in the other collar counties (Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will). From 1991 to 1999, DuPage County saw a 40 percent drop in vehicle thefts, while the other collar counties saw only a 20 percent decrease during this same period. Figure 1 below shows the number of vehicle thefts in DuPage County each year from 1991 to 1999.



Source: Illinois State Police *Uniform Crime Reports*.

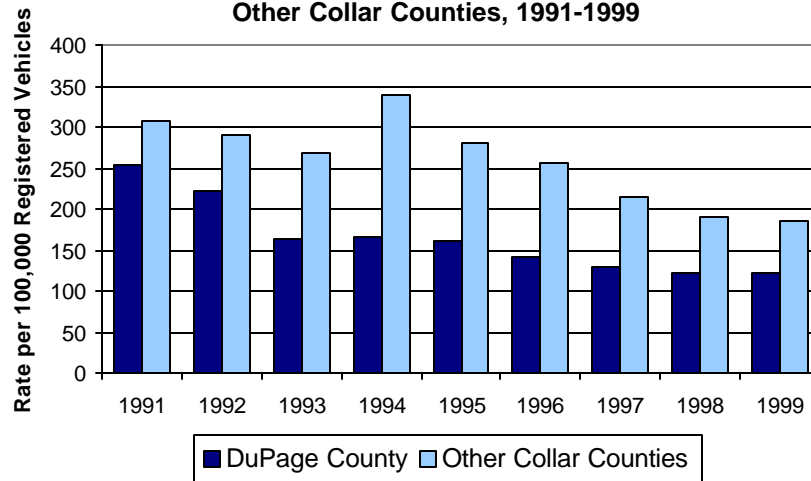
From 1991 to 1999, motor vehicle theft rates in DuPage County declined 52 percent, while the remaining collar counties experienced a 40 percent decline. Figure 2 below shows the motor vehicle theft rates in DuPage County compared to the other collar counties during this period.

BATTLE reports that vehicle thefts in DuPage County are not concentrated in any one community, but distributed throughout the county. In 1999, the top cities for motor vehicle theft in DuPage County included Naperville, Elmhurst, Addison, and Lombard.⁴ These cities, among the largest in the county, have had relatively high numbers of vehicle thefts over the past several years.⁵

⁴ Motor Vehicle Theft Intelligence Clearinghouse. 2000. *DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force Motor Vehicle Theft Summary, January 1-December 31, 1999*. (Analysis of LEADS data).

⁵ Motor Vehicle Theft Intelligence Clearinghouse. 1999. *DuPage County Motor Vehicle Theft Assessment, January 1996-September 1998*. (Analysis of LEADS data).

Figure 2
Motor Vehicle Theft Rates in DuPage and
Other Collar Counties, 1991-1999



Sources: Illinois State Police *Uniform Crime Reports* and Illinois Secretary of State's Office *County Statistical Report*.

BATTLE's data reports indicate that since 1992, DuPage County has seen an increase in the variety and types of vehicle thefts and insurance fraud. Vehicles have been stolen through the use of falsified cashiers' checks, stolen titles, and by stealing keys during test drives from automobile dealerships. BATTLE has also encountered organized importation of vehicles stolen from Canada, as well as a theft ring involved in stealing air bags. The task force also reports an increase in gang participation in vehicle theft, including thefts for simple transportation, drive-by shootings, and as part of complex retagging and other organized fraud operations.

Program Summary

BATTLE combats auto theft and insurance fraud in DuPage County by combining the expertise and resources of multiple law enforcement agencies. Operating since 1992, BATTLE links the efforts of the Illinois State Police, the DuPage County Sheriff's Department, the DuPage County State's Attorney's Office, and the police departments of Naperville, Winfield, and Elmhurst. BATTLE's multi-jurisdictional, cooperative approach maximizes its ability to investigate and prosecute auto theft in DuPage County. Implemented by the DuPage County Sheriff's Department, BATTLE's services are available to all law enforcement agencies within DuPage County.

BATTLE has two main goals: (1) to identify and apprehend vehicle theft and fraud offenders, and (2) to educate police, auto dealers, and citizens about the vehicle theft problem. The task force's investigators are specially trained in auto theft investigations and have statewide authority to pursue those investigations. BATTLE investigators coordinate the resources of the participating agencies and focus these resources on their

investigations. BATTLE proactively combats vehicle theft by gathering intelligence information, conducting surveillance, and monitoring areas prone to vehicle thefts. A DuPage County assistant state's attorney is available at all times to assist in the investigation and prosecution of BATTLE's cases.

BATTLE aims to educate law enforcement personnel, auto dealers, and the general public about the vehicle theft problem. The task force conducts training sessions on auto theft investigation for patrol officers and police investigators. BATTLE also offers a temporary duty assignment for local police officers, providing these officers the opportunity to work with experienced vehicle theft and fraud investigators. The task force conducts seminars on vehicle theft and fraud prevention for auto dealers, educating dealers about current fraud practices and reviewing the dealers' security procedures. BATTLE also presents anti-car theft programs to community organizations, neighborhood watch groups, and citizen police academies. The task force also conducts VIN etching programs, making participants' vehicles less attractive theft targets.

In 2000, BATTLE initiated a new strategy for educating DuPage County residents about auto theft prevention. The task force asked the Motor Vehicle Theft Intelligence Clearinghouse to identify by make and model the top two stolen vehicles in DuPage County. The Illinois Secretary of State's Office provided the names and addresses of DuPage County residents who own these type of vehicles. BATTLE sent letters to 500 of these vehicle owners informing them that their vehicle is among the top auto theft targets in DuPage County. The task force provided information about the Illinois Secretary of State's Beat Auto Theft program, and offered to VIN etch these vehicles at no charge. VIN etching is a process in which the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is permanently etched into the glass of a vehicle's windows, making the vehicle easier to trace and consequently less attractive to auto thieves. Out of the 500 vehicle owners who received letters, only 13 participated in the VIN etching program. Due to the low response to this mailing, the task force is considering alternative strategies for the future.

BATTLE works cooperatively with other Council-funded programs, as well as other law enforcement and insurance industry organizations. In recent years, BATTLE has conducted joint investigations with the Kane County Auto Theft Task Force, the South Suburban Auto Theft Interdiction Network, the Chicago Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the United States Customs Service. The task force has also worked with the DuPage County Sheriff's Gang Suppression Unit, the DuPage Metropolitan Enforcement Group, and the National Insurance Crime Bureau. BATTLE is the only Council-funded program that investigates auto theft in DuPage County.

Program Activity

Since the program began in August 1992, through December 1999, the DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force (BATTLE) has conducted 957 investigations, resulting in 410 persons arrested, 622 prosecuted charges, and 369 persons convicted. Figures 3 through 6 below indicate the number of investigations, persons arrested, charges prosecuted, and persons convicted for each program year.⁶

Figure 3

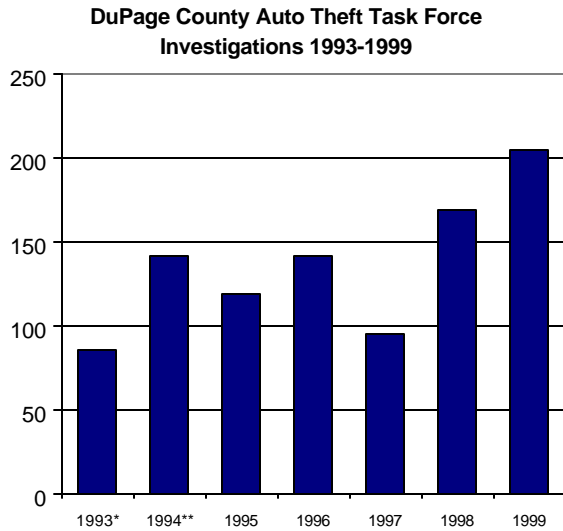


Figure 4

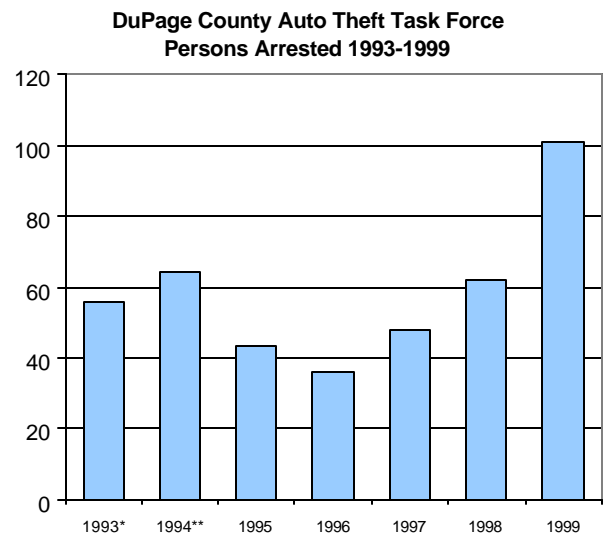


Figure 5

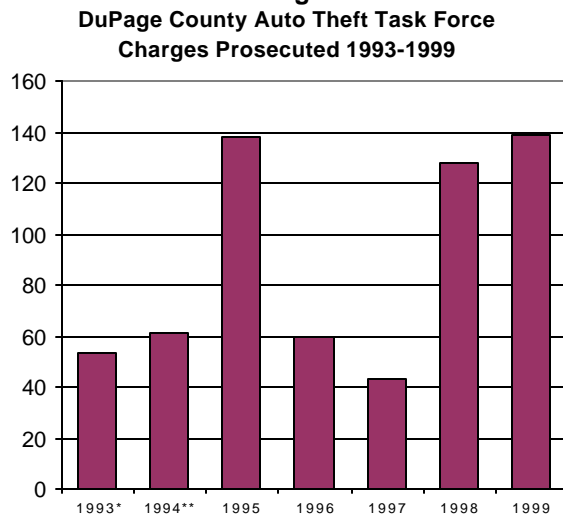
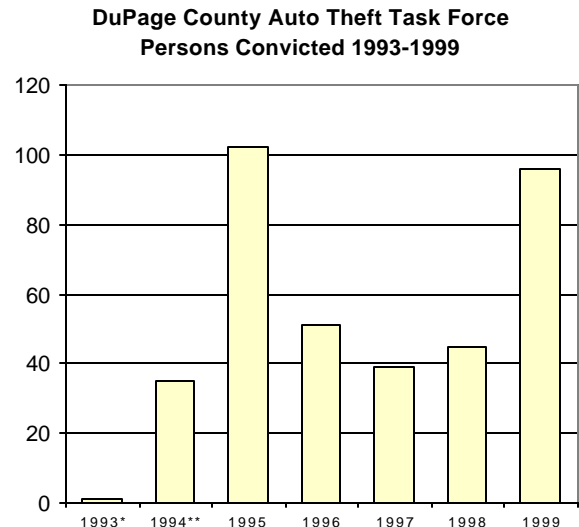


Figure 6



*Includes data from BATTLE program inception in 8/92 through 8/93.

**Includes data from 8/93 through 12/94.

Source: BATTLE Performance Reports

⁶ Due to the time lapse between an arrest and subsequent prosecution, the number of prosecutions and convictions during a year does not directly reflect the number of arrests during the same year.

During this period, BATTLE has recovered 631 vehicles worth an estimated \$10.4 million, including 472 cars, 92 trucks/buses, and 18 motorcycles. In addition, the task force has recovered 31 vehicle parts with a total estimated value of \$50,000.

Funding Summary

The Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Act that took effect on January 1, 1991 created the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council. The Council has the statutory responsibility to prevent, combat, and reduce motor vehicle theft in Illinois.⁷

The Act established the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund, a special trust fund in the State Treasury, from which the Council makes grants to eligible applicants for programs that address the problem of motor vehicle theft in Illinois. The Act requires all insurance companies licensed to write private passenger motor vehicle physical damage coverage in Illinois to pay annually into this trust fund an amount equal to \$1 for each earned car year of exposure for physical damage insurance coverage during the previous calendar year. About \$5.6 million is collected each year.

The DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force is funded by the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund. Figure 7 below lists the amount granted to and expended by the task force for each program year.

Figure 7
DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force
Funding by Program Year

Year	Grant Amount	Expenditures
1993 [*]	\$375,000	\$348,458
1994 [†]	\$505,538	\$485,348
1995	\$398,175	\$389,005
1996	\$358,355	\$328,744
1997	\$368,558	\$276,445
1998	\$373,082	\$349,121
1999	\$389,542	\$362,253
2000	\$397,631	\$161,303 [‡]
TOTAL	\$3,165,881	\$2,700,677

^{*}August 1992 to August 1993.

[†] August 1993 to December 1994.

[‡] January 2000 to September 2000.

⁷ Chapter 20 Illinois Compiled Statutes 4005/2.

Figure 8 below summarizes BATTLE's program expenditures from 1992 through September 2000. Expenditures are divided into six categories:

Personnel—includes salaries, social security, and fringe benefits for program staff.

Equipment—includes computers, communication devices, and other equipment with a cost greater than \$50.

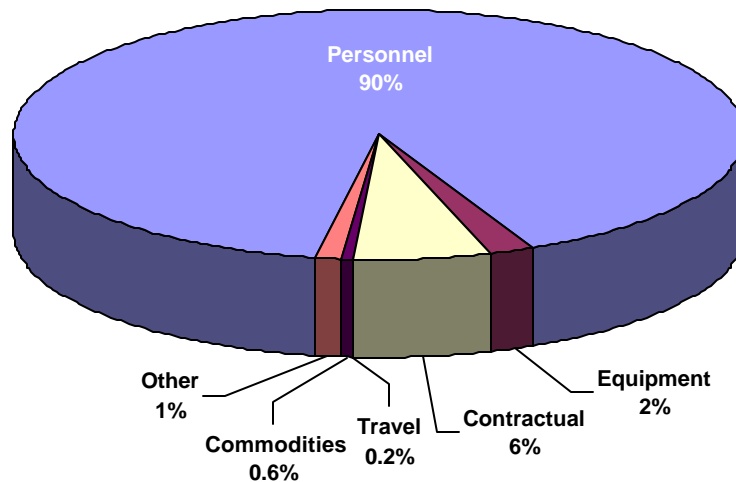
Commodities—includes consumable supplies (such as office supplies) and equipment costing less than \$50.

Travel—includes lodging, food, and transportation expenses incurred by program staff while conducting official program-related business.

Contractual—includes facility costs, utilities, telephone service, equipment rentals, and wages for hourly personnel.

Other—includes any costs not covered by the above categories.

Figure 8
DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force
Percentage of Expenditures by Category*
1992-2000



*Due to rounding, the percentages may not total 100 percent.

Conclusion

Since the DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force (BATTLE) began operation, vehicle thefts have declined in DuPage County. From 1991 to 1999, motor vehicle thefts in DuPage County decreased 40 percent, from 1,686 to 1,011. Though data on the value of stolen vehicles is not available at the state or county level,⁸ the FBI estimates that the average value of vehicles stolen in the United States in 1999 was \$6,104.⁹ Based on this value, the decrease in DuPage County auto thefts amounts to a savings of \$4.1 million.

BATTLE has received a total of \$3.2 million in funding from the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund, and has recovered an estimated \$10.4 million in stolen vehicles and parts. Combining the recovery value with the savings from reduced auto theft, the task force has produced a \$14.5 million 'return' on its \$3.2 million in funding, more than a 450 percent 'return rate.'

⁸ BATTLE reports the total estimated value of all the vehicles that it recovers each month. However, this includes only cases handled by the task force, not all vehicle thefts within DuPage County.

⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2000. *Crime in the United States – 1999: Uniform Crime Reports*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
