

***Program Profile:***  
**Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit**



*Prepared by*

**The Research and Analysis Unit of the  
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority**

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**ILLINOIS MOTOR VEHICLE  
THEFT PREVENTION COUNCIL**

***Program Profile:***  
**Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit**

**Prepared for**  
**the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council**

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## Introduction

The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit is a nine person unit that investigates and prosecutes cases of motor vehicle theft and related crimes in Cook County. The unit consists of one supervising and three senior prosecutors, two state's attorney's investigators, one administrative assistant and two part-time support personnel. The program aggressively targets offenders involved in motor vehicle theft and other vehicle-related crimes, aiming to increase the percentage of these cases that result in criminal prosecutions and to maintain a high conviction rate.

The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit serves Cook County, the state's most populous county. Cook County holds 43 percent of the state's population and 20 percent of its registered vehicles. The county's population has remained fairly constant since 1992, the year the Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions program began. The United States Census Bureau estimates that Cook County had a 1999 population of 5.2 million.

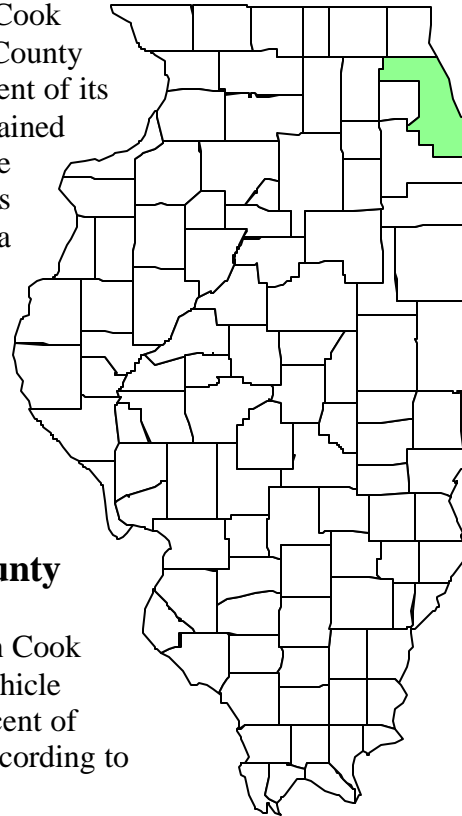
In 1999, there were over 2 million vehicles registered in Cook County, according to the Secretary of State's Office. In addition, tourism and convention travel bring more than 19 million vehicles into the county each year.<sup>1</sup>

### Motor Vehicle-Related Crimes in Cook County

The large concentration of both vehicles and people in Cook County provides numerous opportunities for motor vehicle theft and other vehicle-related crimes. Nearly 80 percent of Illinois motor vehicle thefts occur in Cook County, according to data from the Illinois State Police.

In recent years, some motor vehicle-related crimes have become more complex. Such crimes include sophisticated schemes of insurance fraud, vehicle identity alteration, 'chop shops,' and vehicle export rings. Increasingly, these crimes are committed by organized criminal enterprises operating across multiple jurisdictions, some of which are international in scope.

Carjacking is another motor vehicle-related crime that is a growing problem. While carjacking still occurs infrequently, national data suggest it is on the rise. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that between 1987 and 1992, there were an average of 35,000



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<sup>1</sup> ICJIA calculation based on data from the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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carjacking incidents per year in the United States;<sup>2</sup> between 1992 and 1996, the annual average increased to 49,000.<sup>3</sup>

## **Program Summary**

The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit aggressively pursues offenders involved in motor vehicle theft and other motor vehicle-related crimes. The unit aims to increase the percentage of motor vehicle theft offenses that ultimately result in criminal prosecutions, and to maintain a high level of convictions for those offenses. The program targets the end-users of stolen vehicles and their parts, focusing on individuals or groups who are responsible for a disproportionate share of vehicle theft.

Cases are referred to the unit from Council-funded task forces, the Chicago Police Department, the Illinois State Police, and other law enforcement agencies. In addition, the prosecutors involved in the program search felony filings in Cook County for cases of auto theft and other vehicle-related crimes. When suitable cases are found, they are taken up by the unit for prosecution.

The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit employs a vertical prosecution strategy, in which one prosecutor handles a case from intake to sentencing. This differs from other prosecution arrangements in which different attorneys handle separate stages of case processing. Vertical prosecution is favored by attorneys who deal regularly with organized crime or gang-related cases.<sup>4</sup>

State's attorney's office investigators who are specially trained in motor vehicle theft investigation are also assigned to the unit. These investigators assist in gathering evidence for cases, and supplementing the preliminary work done by the police agency that originates the case. This includes tracking down relevant documents, locating witnesses, and conducting detailed background investigations.

The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit consists of four assistant state's attorneys, two state's attorney investigators, and one full-time and two part-time administrative support personnel. The program conducts its activities from the Cook County State's Attorney's Office.

Operating since 1992, the Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit is implemented by the Office of Cook County State's Attorney. The program covers all of Cook County.

The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit is the only unit of its kind in Illinois. No other Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council-funded programs duplicate its services.

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<sup>2</sup> Rand, Michael R. "Carjacking: National Crime Victimization Survey." *Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief*. March, 1994. Washington, DC.

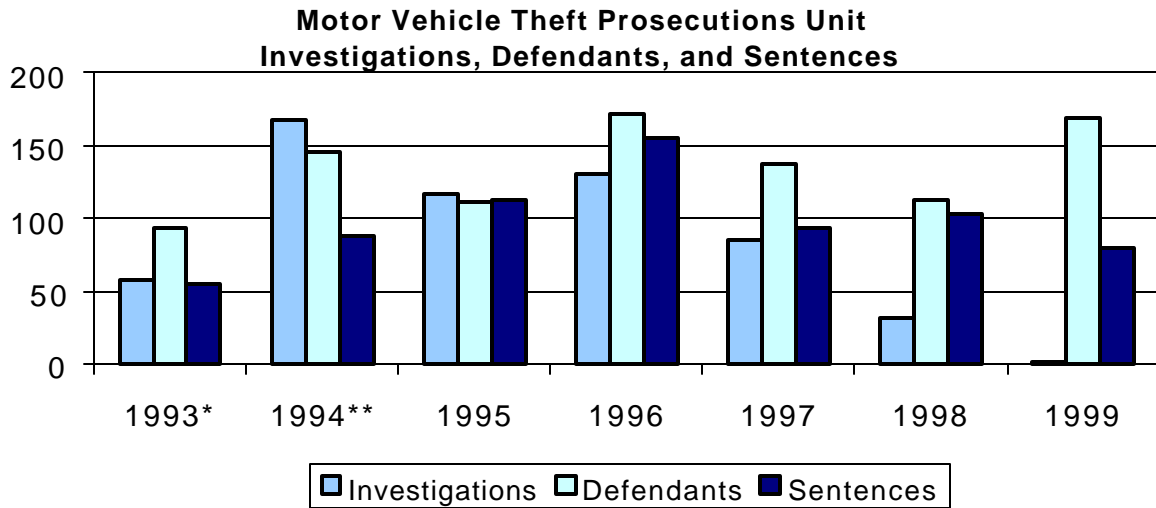
<sup>3</sup> Klaus, Patsy. "Carjacking in the United States, 1992-96." *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*. March, 1999. Washington, DC.

<sup>4</sup> "Prosecuting Gangs: A National Assessment." *NIJ Research in Brief*, February 1995, Washington, DC.

## Program Activity

Since the program began in September 1992, through the end of 1999, the Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit has conducted 593 investigations, resulting in 820 indictments of 944 defendants. The unit's prosecutions have resulted in the sentencing of 688 defendants and the recovery of over \$477,000 in restitution, fines, and court costs. Figure 1 below indicates the number of investigations conducted, defendants charged, and cases sentenced for each program year. Figure 2 shows the total amount of restitution, fines, and court costs ordered for each program year.

**Figure 1**

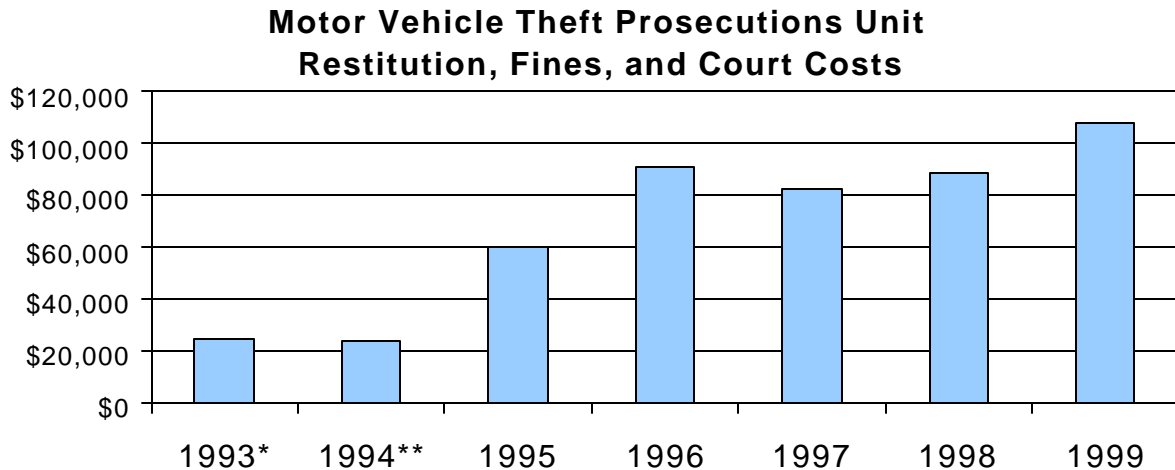


\*September, 1992 to November, 1993

\*\*December, 1993 to December, 1994

Source: Monthly data reports, Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit

**Figure 2**



\*September, 1992 to November, 1993

\*\*December, 1993 to December, 1994

Source: Monthly data reports, Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit

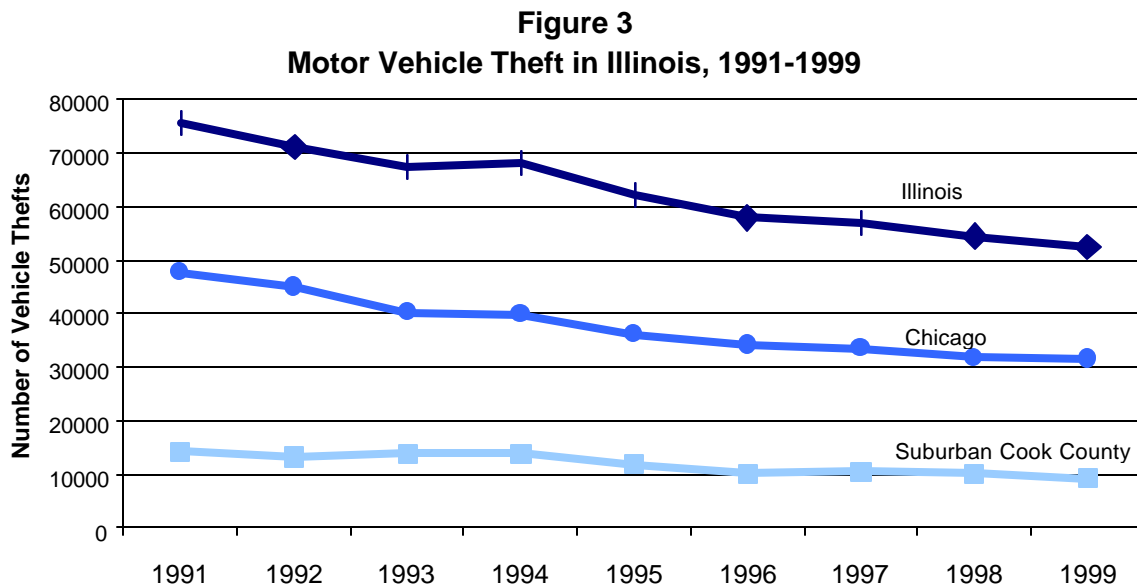
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## Conclusion

The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit has played an important role in the reduction of vehicle theft and vehicle-related crimes in Cook County. The unit works to prosecute and convict career auto thieves, members of organized auto theft rings, and others who are responsible for a disproportionate share of vehicle-related crimes. Since it began in 1992, the program has convicted nearly 700 offenders and recovered over \$477,000 in restitution, fines, and court costs.

Figure 3 shows the trend in motor vehicle thefts for Illinois, Chicago, and Suburban Cook County from 1991 to 1999. The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit began in September 1992.



Source: Illinois State Police *Uniform Crime Reports*

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## 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.

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 Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit is funded by the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund. The table below lists amount granted to the unit for each program year (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
**The Motor Vehicle Theft Prosecutions Unit**  
Funding by Program Year

<b>Year</b>	<b>Grant Amount</b>
1993*	\$489,183
1994**	\$505,489
1995	\$564,883
1996	\$505,395
1997	\$565,352
1998	\$576,137
1999	\$582,502
2000	\$582,316
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,371,257</b>

\*September, 1992 to November, 1993

\*\*December, 1993 to December, 1994