

A Profile of the Motor Vehicle Theft Investigation Training Program



Prepared for
the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council

George Ryan, Governor
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**ILLINOIS MOTOR VEHICLE
THEFT PREVENTION COUNCIL**

Introduction

One component of the Council's theft prevention strategy is an effort to increase awareness and understanding of the problems associated with motor vehicle theft. The Motor Vehicle Theft Investigation Training Program instructs law enforcement officers and prosecutors on the characteristics of vehicle theft cases. The program has provided training to law enforcement and insurance industry investigators, patrol officers, and prosecuting attorneys since 1992.

Program Summary

From June 1992 to December 1995, the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board administered the motor vehicle theft training program. During this time, the program offered three levels of training: basic, advanced, and specialist.

The basic course presented patrol officers with techniques for investigating motor vehicle theft. The course included an overview of the vehicle theft problem and the methods used to steal vehicles. Participants in the course were taught how to identify stolen vehicles, altered Vehicle Identification Numbers (VINs), and fraudulent Certificates of Title. The basic course was presented in both 8-hour and 32-hour formats. From June 1992 to December 1995, 516 students completed the 8-hour basic course and 186 students completed the 32-hour basic course.

The advanced course, available to those who had completed the basic course, was developed to train officers assigned to investigate auto theft on a full-time basis. The course covered how to determine vehicle make and model from a VIN, and how to verify VIN validity. In addition, the course covered types of auto dealer licenses, retagging operations, and types of offenses relating to motor vehicle theft. The advanced course was presented in both 8-hour and 36-hour formats. From June 1992 to December 1995, 99 students completed the 8-hour advanced course and 192 students completed the 36-hour advanced course.

Officers who completed the advanced course were eligible for the specialist course, designed to address topics of concern to expert motor vehicle theft investigators. The course covered the vehicle theft problem from the 1970s through the 1990s, the development of the VIN, and services available from the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB). The course also covered "proactive" investigations, sting operations and chop shops, insurance fraud, vehicle arson and explosives, identifying construction and farm equipment, and qualifications for testifying in court. From June 1992 to December 1995, 117 students completed the 36-hour specialist course.

In addition to these general courses, the training program offered three courses on specific topics:

Courtroom Tactics for Auto Theft Investigators and Prosecutors (8 hours) described the effective presentation of evidence in auto theft prosecutions. The course also covered the statutory elements of auto theft-related offenses, problems of proof and their resolution, and legal considerations involving warrantless searches and seizures and roadside interviews. From June 1992 to December 1995, 146 students completed this course.

Vehicle Identification Number Restoration (4 hours) offered hands-on training in techniques for “restoring” a VIN that has been obliterated or altered, including chemical and heat methods. From June 1992 to December 1995, 45 students completed this course.

Vehicle Theft Photography (8 hours) was designed to instruct patrol officers on what to look for and photograph when examining an auto theft crime scene. The course covered the basics of photography, how to photograph a vehicle and a vehicle recovery scene, and the use of photographs as evidence. From June 1992 to December 1995, 52 students completed this course.

The Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board delivered a total of 23,760 student training hours¹ to 1,353 students. The program also produced a handbook on motor vehicle theft for use in the training courses. In 1992, the program distributed copies of the *Auto Theft Handbook* to law enforcement officers throughout Illinois.

In 1996, The Illinois State Police Academy (ISPA) became the grantee for the Motor Vehicle Theft Investigation Training Program. The Illinois State Police Academy has delivered a total of 21,248 student training hours to 1,803 students over four years. The ISPA training program offers two courses in motor vehicle theft investigations:

Motor Vehicle Theft for Patrol Officers (8 hours) covers vehicle theft techniques, methods for detecting vehicle theft, basic investigation and recovery techniques, and an overview of auto theft operations. The course also deals with methods for detecting altered Vehicle Identification Numbers (VINs) and procedures for verifying Illinois vehicle title information.

Motor Vehicle Theft for Investigators (36 hours) is oriented toward members of motor vehicle theft task forces and others who investigate auto theft full time. The class covers techniques for detecting and investigating organized vehicle theft operations, and includes several practical exercises. Course topics include:

¹ Student training hours = (Number of Students in a course * Length of course in hours).

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- The legal aspects of vehicle theft related to search and seizure warrants, towing, relocation, and Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the Illinois Vehicle Code.
 - The location of VINs and confidential VINs.
 - The function of the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) and the use of the NICB Manual.
 - How to detect a stolen vehicle.
 - The importance of the interview process.
 - The importance of documentation.
 - The importance of recognizing, preserving, and respecting the crime scene.
 - The motivation and methods behind insurance fraud.
 - The various resources available to the vehicle theft investigator.

These courses are held both at the Illinois State Police Academy and as in-service training in locations throughout the state. In 2000, for example, training sessions were conducted in Jerseyville, East Moline, Chicago, Rockford, and several other cities.

Instructors for the training courses are field personnel who specialize in investigating motor vehicle theft. These include Illinois State Police vehicle investigation officers who deal with motor vehicle theft in their respective districts, as well as Special Agents or Inspectors assigned to a Motor Vehicle Theft Task Force. The instructors' field experience keeps them up to date on the most current methods and techniques used by offenders.

In 1998 and 1999 the training program offered a course entitled *Motor Vehicle Theft for Prosecutors*. This 4-hour course is designed to improve prosecutors' knowledge of the seriousness of the motor vehicle theft problem, the terminology of vehicle theft cases, and the steps necessary to bring such cases to trial. Thirty-three students, including prosecutors and vehicle theft investigators, have completed this training. In 2000, the program began developing a 45-minute training video for prosecutors, in an effort to deliver some of the course content to a potentially wider audience.

The program also produces *Motor Vehicle Theft: A Handbook for Peace Officers*, which is provided to participants in the training courses, Illinois State Police Academy cadets, and Illinois state's attorneys. The handbook and other curriculum materials are updated regularly by program staff.

Program Activity

The Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board trained 1,353 students from June 1992 to December 1995. Figure 1 shows the courses offered, the length of each course in hours, and the total number of students who completed each course during this period.

Figure 1
Motor Vehicle Theft
Investigation Training Program
June 1992 to December 1995

Course Title	Students
Basic Vehicle Theft	
8-hour course	516
32-hour course	186
Advanced Vehicle Theft	
8-hour course	99
36-hour course	192
Specialized Vehicle Theft (36 hours)	117
Courtroom Tactics (8 hours)	146
Vehicle Theft Photography (8 hours)	52
VIN Restoration (4 hours)	45

TOTAL = 1,353

Source: Training Program Monthly Performance Reports

The Illinois State Police Academy trained 1,803 students from September 1996 to December 2000. Figure 2 shows the number of course sessions and the number of students trained in each course for each program year.

Figure 2
Motor Vehicle Theft
Investigation Training Program
1997-2000

	MV Theft for Patrol Officers		MV Theft for Investigators		MV Theft for Prosecutors**	
	Sessions	Students	Sessions	Students	Sessions	Students
1997*	22	422	5	48	n/a	n/a
1998	20	348	5	75	4	20
1999	23	395	5	67	4	13
2000	20	353	4	62	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	85	1,518	19	252	8	33

*September 1996 to December 1997

**Course offered only in 1998 and 1999.

Source: Training Program Monthly Performance Reports

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.²

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 Investigation Training Program is funded by the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund. Figure 3 lists the amount granted to and expended by the program for each grant period.

Figure 3
Motor Vehicle Theft Investigation
Training Program
Funding by Program Year

Grant Period	Grant Amount	Expenditures	Agency
6/92-11/93	\$211,950	\$142,713	Illinois Law Enforcement Officers Training and Standards Board
12/93-12/94	\$327,597	\$154,507	
1/95-12/95	\$200,000	\$106,497	
9/96-12/97	\$98,683	\$40,604	Illinois State Police Academy
1/98-12/98	\$87,213	\$67,454	
1/99-12/99	\$93,212	\$70,659	
1/00-12/00	\$80,546	\$33,214*	
TOTAL	\$1,099,201	\$582,434	

* January 2000 to October 2000.
 Unexpended funds are returned to the Council.

² Chapter 20 Illinois Compiled Statutes 4005/2.

Conclusion

The Motor Vehicle Theft Investigation Training Program works to increase the knowledge of auto theft investigative and prosecution techniques among patrol officers, investigators, and prosecutors in Illinois. The training program is one component of the Council's theft prevention strategy, along with enforcement, prevention, and prosecution initiatives designed to reduce vehicle theft in Illinois.

From June 1992 to December 1995, while the Illinois Law Enforcement Officers Training and Standards Board operated the training program, 1,353 students received instruction in investigation or prosecution of motor vehicle-related crimes. The program received \$740,000 in grant funds, which equates to a cost of \$547 per student. The Training and Standards Board delivered a total of 23,760 student training hours, calculated by multiplying the number of students in each course by the course length in hours and adding the results for all courses. Based on the program's funding amount, this equates to a cost of \$31 per student training hour.

From September 1996 to December 2000, while the Illinois State Police Academy operated the training program, more than 1,800 students participated in the program. The program received \$360,000 in grant funds, which equates to a cost of \$200 per student. The Academy delivered a total of 21,248 student training hours. Based on the program's funding amount, this equates to a cost of \$17 per student training hour.