

A Profile of the Metro East Auto Theft Task Force



Prepared for
the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor
Larry G. Trent, Chairman

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Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

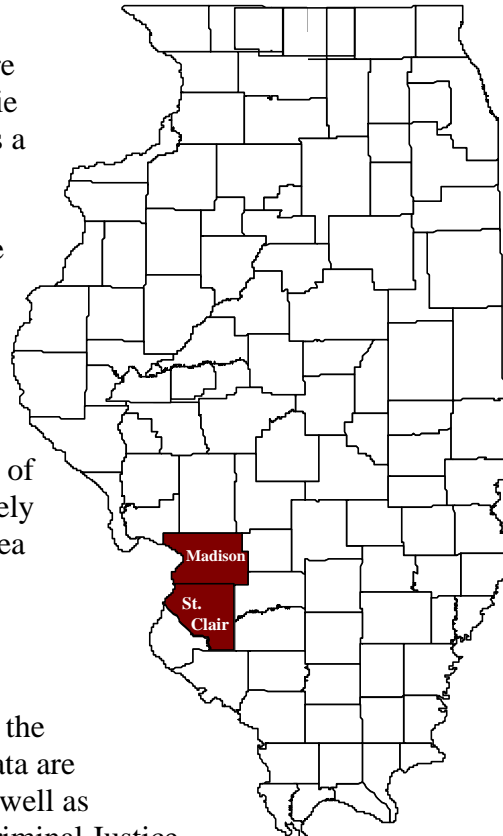
Lori G. Levin
Executive Director



**ILLINOIS MOTOR VEHICLE
THEFT PREVENTION COUNCIL**

Introduction

The Metro East Auto Theft Task Force serves Madison and St. Clair counties. The counties are located in the southwest region of Illinois, and lie adjacent to St. Louis, Missouri. The area covers a total of 1,389 square miles. The region features both large population centers and vast rural spaces. Both Madison and St. Clair counties are among Illinois' 28 urban counties. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, Madison County had a 2002 population of 261,409 and St. Clair County had a 2002 population of 257,904.¹ Thus, in 2002, the Metro East Auto Theft Task Force served a total population of approximately 519,313. There were approximately 478,533 vehicles registered in the Metro East area in 2002, according to the Illinois Secretary of State's Office.²



In this report, data from both of the counties are analyzed together, and statistics are reported for the area covered by the program as a whole. The data are based on the Illinois Uniform Crime Reports as well as monthly data reports submitted to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority by the Metro East Auto Theft Task Force.

¹ United States Bureau of the Census, 2003.

² State of Illinois, Office of the Secretary of State. 2002. *County Statistical Report for Motor Vehicle License Units and Transactions*.

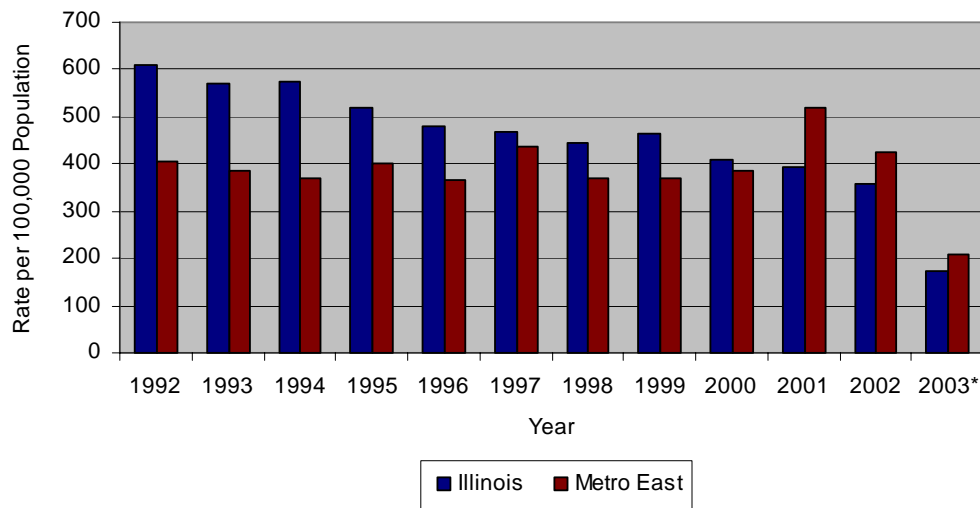
Motor Vehicle Theft in the Metro East Area

According to the Illinois State Police, the number of motor vehicle thefts reported in the area covered by the Metro East Auto Theft Task Force increased 6 percent between 1992 and 2002, from 2,077 thefts to 2,202 thefts. Motor vehicle thefts decreased 36 percent statewide during the same period. Preliminary data between January and June 2003 show 1,065 motor vehicle thefts in the Metro East area, while there were 19,962 auto thefts across Illinois.

Between 1992 and 2002, a time when the Metro East area's population was growing, the motor vehicle theft rate in the region increased from 403 to 424 offenses per 100,000 population; however, the statewide motor vehicle theft rate decreased from 609 to 359 offenses during the same time period. According to preliminary data, there were 207 offenses per 100,000 population in the Metro East area between January and June 2003, while Illinois experienced 174 offenses per 100,000 population. Figure 1 shows the motor vehicle theft rate in Illinois and the Metro East area during this period.

Figure 1

**Motor Vehicle Theft Rate
1992-2003**



Data Source: Illinois Uniform Crime Reports

*January – June, 2003 Preliminary ISP data

Data reports from the Metro East Auto Theft Task Force describe several vehicle theft problems in the area. The main focus of task force officers is the identification and arrest of street gang members that operate in the area. Task force officers believe that most gang members steal cars for transportation or to facilitate other crimes such as drive-by shootings and transportation of drugs or firearms. The task force also encounters cases of insurance fraud, chop shops, re-tagging operations, and false vehicle theft reporting.

The task force has also established partnerships with law enforcement agencies in St. Louis, Missouri and the surrounding metropolitan area. The coordination and joint effort helps all of the participating agencies target street gangs that continually cross between Illinois and Missouri.

During 2001, eight Metro Link Train Stations were built in the Metro East area. The existence of these stations has created more challenges for the task force. These stations have increased opportunities for gang members to travel between various areas and cities. The trains provide these individuals with an easy method of access into areas in the Metro East area. The task force reported an increase in local gangs crossing state boundaries to commit vehicle theft.

Program Summary

The Metro East Auto Theft Task Force combats auto theft in Madison and St. Clair counties by combining the expertise and resources of multiple law enforcement agencies. Operating since 1992, the task force links the efforts of the Illinois State Police, the sheriff's offices of Madison and St. Clair counties, the Illinois Secretary of State Police, and the police departments of Belleville, Cahokia, Collinsville, East St. Louis, Fairview Heights, and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. The task force's multi-jurisdictional, cooperative approach maximizes its ability to investigate and prosecute auto theft throughout the area. The services of the task force are available to all law enforcement agencies within Madison and St. Clair counties.

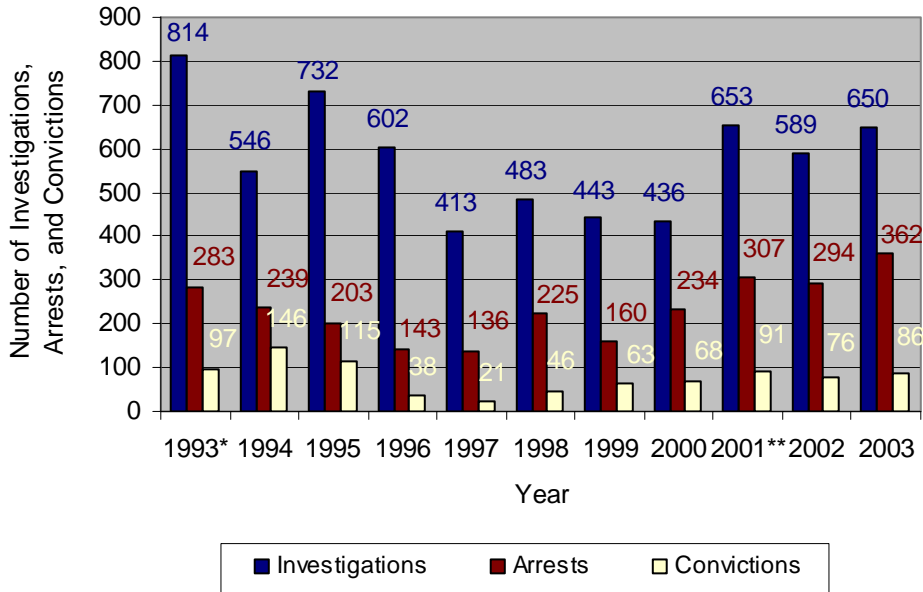
The Metro East Auto Theft Task Force has a total of sixteen personnel. The task force consists of ten full time police officers, two assistant state's attorneys, a grant administrator, a computer analyst, a fiscal officer, and an administrative assistant. The task force originally operated out of the Collinsville Police Department, but in March of 2001, the Belleville Police Department became the implementing entity.

Program Activity

Since the program began in September 1992, through December 2002, the Metro East Auto Theft Task Force has conducted 5,711 self-initiated and assisted investigations, resulting in 2,224 arrests and 761 convictions. In 2003, the task force has continued to investigate motor vehicle theft cases and provide assistance to law enforcement personnel in Madison and St. Clair counties. In 2003, the task force has conducted 650 investigations (485 initiated and 165 assisted investigations), resulting in 362 arrests and 86 convictions. Figure 2 shows the number of motor vehicle theft investigations, arrests, and convictions for each program year.

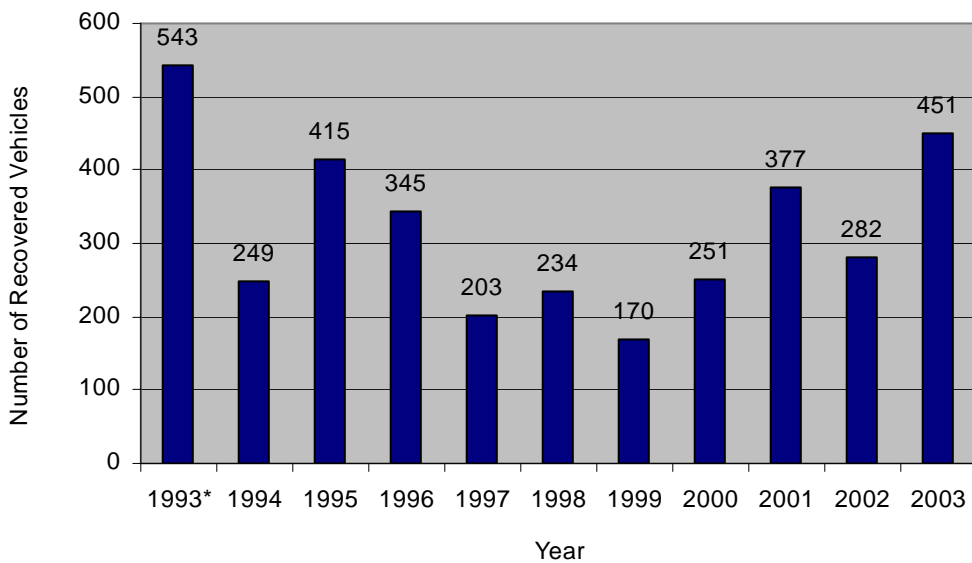
From August 1992 thru December 2003, the task force has recovered 3,520 vehicles worth an estimated \$24 million. Figure 3 shows the number of vehicle recoveries made by the task force for each year.

Figure 2
Metro East Auto Theft Task Force
Investigations, Arrests, and Convictions
1993-2003



*The 1993 data covers the period from August 1992 to December 1993.
 ** Beginning in 2001, Investigations were recorded as either Initiated (by the unit) or Assisted (assists to other agencies) Investigations. These yearly totals represent the combination of both.

Figure 3
Metro East Motor Vehicle Recoveries
1993-2003



*The 1993 data covers the period from August 1992 to December 1993.

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 \$5.8 million is collected each year.

The Metro East Auto Theft Task Force is funded by the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund. Figure 4 lists the amounts granted to and expended by the task force for each program year.

Table 1

Metro East Auto Theft Task Force
Funding by Program Year

Year	Grant Amount	Expenditures
1993	\$509,296	\$458,691
1994	\$717,593	\$639,180
1995	\$693,750	\$621,016
1996	\$569,120	\$565,769
1997	\$594,571	\$578,462
1998	\$597,403	\$584,261
1999	\$594,477	\$565,746
2000	\$589,172	\$562,693
2001	\$589,172	\$597,598
2002	\$613,172	\$580,769
2003	\$589,172	\$555,789
TOTAL	\$6,656,898	\$6,309,975

*Note: Unexpended grant funds are returned to the Council.

Figure 5 summarizes the task force's expenditures from 1992 through 2003. 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.

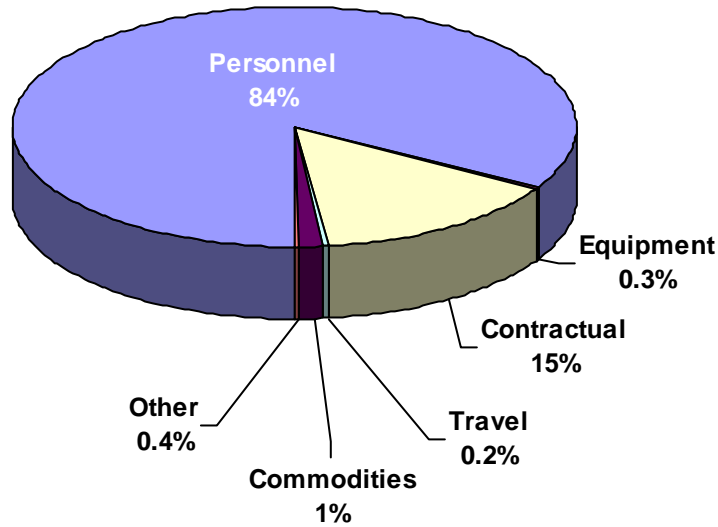
Travel—includes lodging, food, and transportation expenses incurred by program staff while conducting official program-related business.

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 4

Metro East Auto Theft Task Force
Percentage of Expenditures by Category
1993 - 2003



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

Conclusion

Since the Metro East Auto Theft Task Force began operation, vehicle thefts have slightly increased within the task force's jurisdiction. Between 1992 and 2000, motor vehicle thefts in the Metro East area decreased 49 percent, from 2,077 to 1,990. However, in 2001, auto thefts significantly increased 35 percent to 2,691, before decreasing to 2,202 in 2002. Preliminary data by the Illinois State Police show that between January and June 2003, there were 1,065 motor vehicle thefts in the Metro East area.

Data on the value of stolen vehicles are not available at the state or county level;³ however, the FBI estimates that the average value of a vehicle stolen in the United States in 2002 was \$6,701.⁴ Based on this value, the decrease of 489 auto thefts in the Metro East area between 2001 and 2002 amounts to a saving of \$3.3 million.

In 2002, the task force has received a total of \$613,172 in funding from the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund, and has recovered an estimated \$2 million in stolen vehicles, cargo, and parts. Combining the recovery value with the savings from reduced auto theft, the task force has produced a \$5.3 million 'return' on its \$613,172 in funding, a 'return rate' of over \$8.50 for every \$1 of funding in 2002.

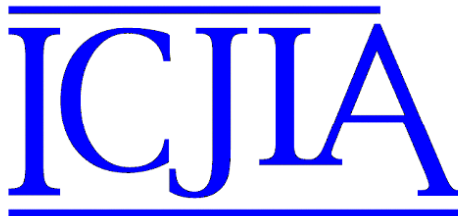
³ The task force reports the total estimated value of all the vehicles that it recovers each month. However, this includes only cases handled by the task force, not all vehicle thefts within the Metro East area.

⁴ This is the most recent estimate available. *Crime in the United States – 2002: Uniform Crime Reports*. Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2003.

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Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

120 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 1016
Chicago, Illinois 60606
Telephone: 312-793-8550
TDD: 312-793-4170
Fax: 312-793-8422
www.icjia.state.il.us



Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor
Sheldon Sorosky, Chairman
Lori G. Levin, Executive Director