

A Profile of the South Suburban Auto Theft Interdiction Network (SSATIN)



Prepared for
the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council

George Ryan, Governor
Sam Nolen, Chairman

November, 2000



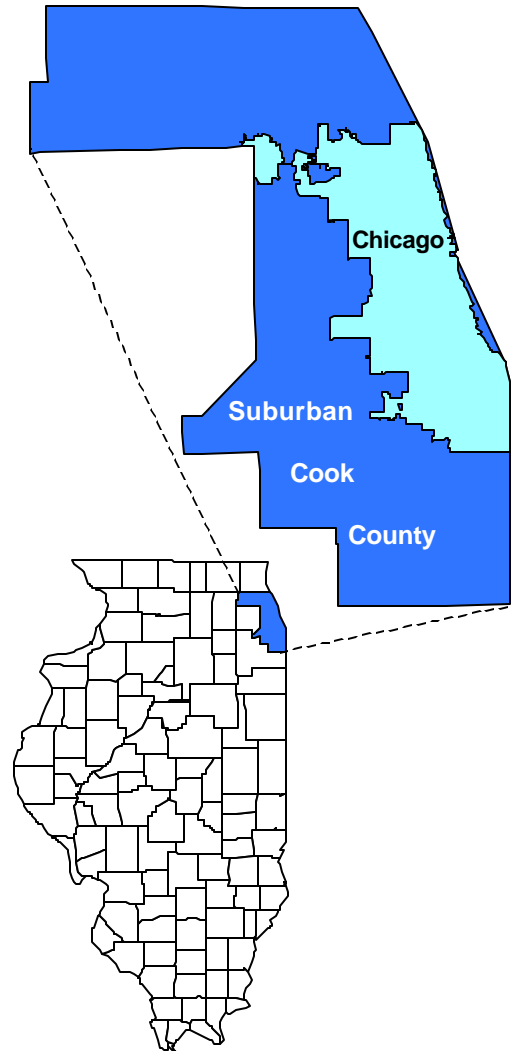
**ILLINOIS MOTOR VEHICLE
THEFT PREVENTION COUNCIL**

Introduction

The South Suburban Auto Theft Interdiction Network (SSATIN) serves suburban Cook County, focusing primarily on the southern and western suburban areas. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, suburban Cook County had a 1999 population of 2.4 million, comprising nearly half of the county's 5.2 million residents.¹ Covering an area of 946 square miles, Cook County has the highest population density among Illinois' 102 counties.²

As the state's largest population center, Cook County is a major center of motor vehicle traffic in Illinois. According to the Illinois Secretary of State's Office, more than 3.4 million vehicles were registered in Cook County in 1999, the most vehicles in any Illinois county.³ Many of these vehicles are owned by suburban Cook County residents.

In addition to vehicles owned by Cook County residents, many commuters and tourists drive into Cook County each day. The Census Bureau estimates that more than 300,000 commuters drive into Cook County each workday.⁴ Also, tourism and convention travel bring more than 19 million vehicles into the county each year.⁵ The large number of vehicles that pass through Cook County provides abundant opportunities for motor vehicle theft.



¹ Estimate for Cook County excluding Chicago. United States Bureau of the Census. 2000. *Population Estimates for Places: Annual Time Series, July 1, 1990 to 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*.

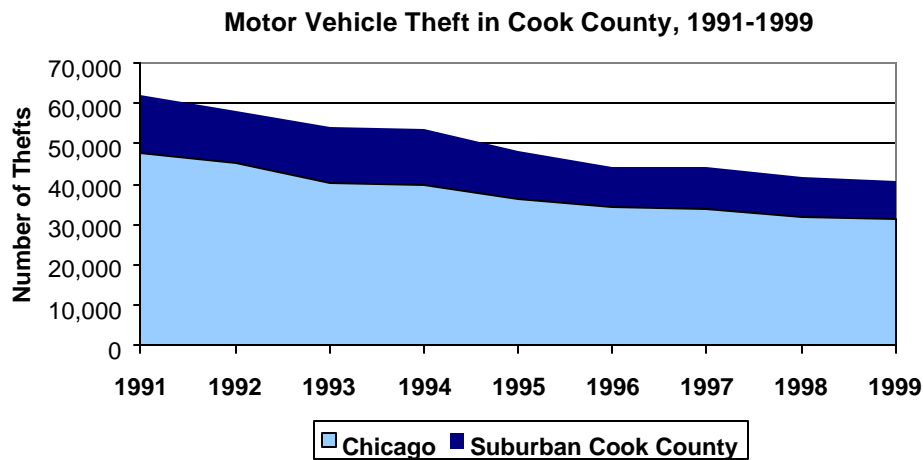
⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. *Travel to Work Characteristics for the 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas by Population in the United States: 1990 Census*; Chicago Area Transportation Study. 1993. *1990 Work Trip Flows Between Illinois Counties*.

⁵ ICJIA calculation based on data from the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Motor Vehicle Theft in Cook County

In 1991, Cook County's 62,012 motor vehicle thefts accounted for more than 80 percent of Illinois motor vehicle thefts. By 1999, this number had dropped 34 percent to 40,762 thefts, accounting for 78 percent of vehicle thefts in Illinois. The vehicle theft trend in suburban Cook County (Cook County excluding Chicago) mirrors the decline in the county as a whole. In 1991, 14,302 motor vehicles were reported stolen in suburban Cook County; by 1999, this number had dropped 35 percent to 9,238. The rest of Illinois saw a 13 percent reduction in motor vehicle theft during this same period.

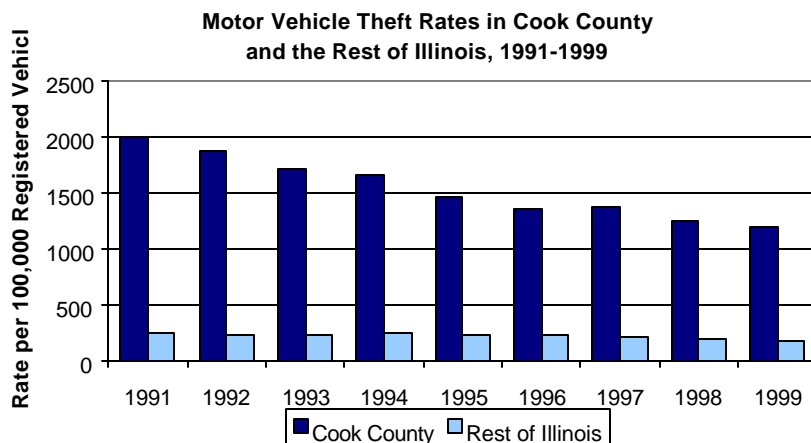
Figure 1



Source: Illinois State Police *Uniform Crime Reports*

As seen in figure 2, from 1991 to 1999 motor vehicle theft rates in Cook County declined 41 percent, while the rest of Illinois experienced a 28 percent decline.

Figure 2



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

Program Summary

SSATIN combats auto theft and insurance fraud in suburban Cook County by combining the expertise and resources of multiple law enforcement agencies. Operating since 1992, SSATIN links the efforts of the Illinois State Police, the Illinois Secretary of State Police, the National Insurance Crime Bureau, and the police departments of the following communities:

Bellwood	Dolton	Steger
Calumet City	Maywood*	Stone Park
Chicago Heights	Orland Park	University of Illinois
Cicero*	South Holland	at Chicago (UIC)

*Cicero and Maywood, new to SSATIN in 2000, pulled their officers out of the program after 9 months due to staffing shortages in their own departments.

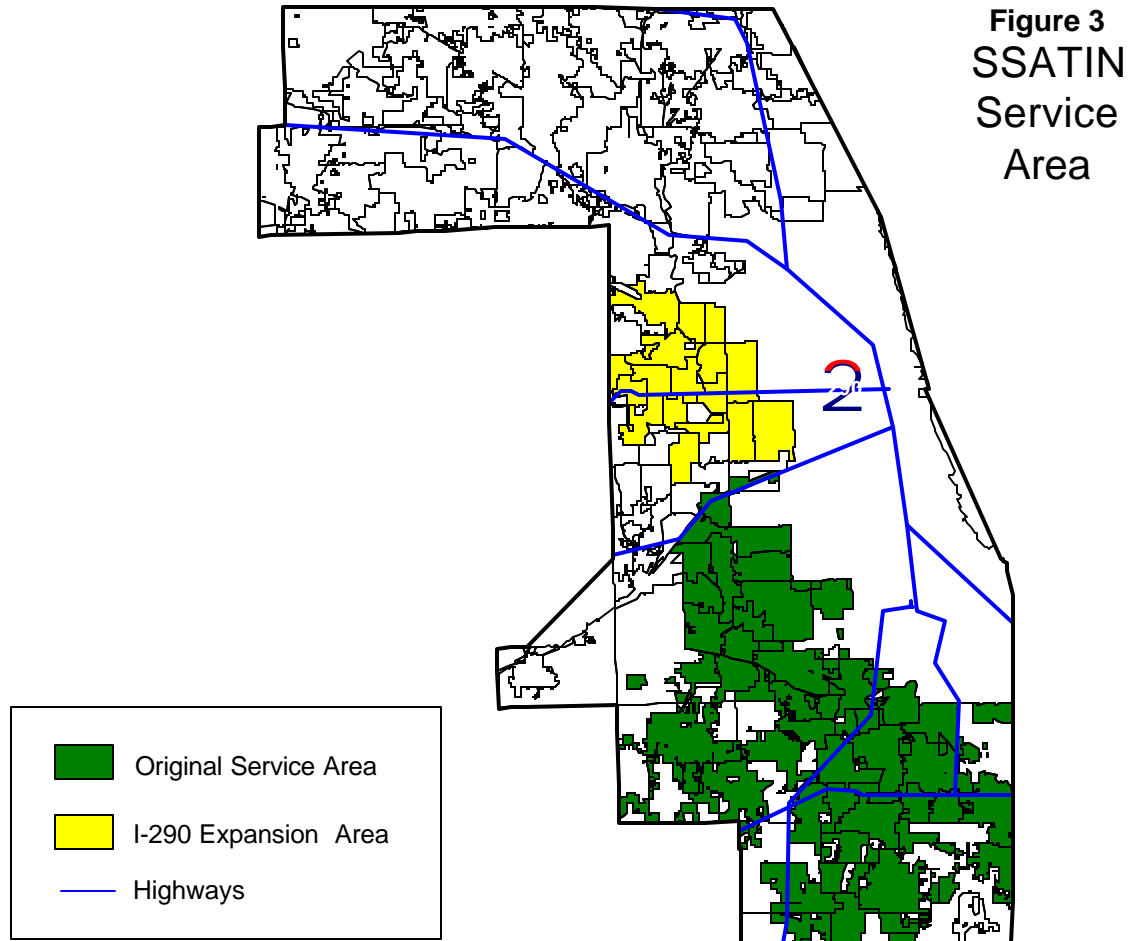
SSATIN's multi-jurisdictional, cooperative approach maximizes its ability to investigate and prosecute auto theft in suburban Cook County.

The task force addresses the auto theft problem through prevention, enforcement, and training. Prevention efforts include public education, such as auto theft prevention seminars presented to civic groups, as well as VIN etching programs. 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.

SSATIN's enforcement efforts include gathering intelligence information, conducting surveillance, developing informants, and conducting covert and 'sting' operations. The task force's investigators are specially trained in auto theft investigations and have statewide authority to pursue those investigations. Investigators coordinate the resources of the participating agencies and focus these resources on their investigations. A Cook County assistant state's attorney assists in the investigation and prosecution of SSATIN's cases.

The task force also offers a training program in auto theft investigation to officers from local law enforcement agencies. Participants receive hands-on training in investigative, interview, and interrogation techniques, intelligence gathering, and other skills related to complex auto theft investigations. Officers in the program are assigned to SSATIN for the training period. While an officer is training with SSATIN, the task force reimburses the officer-in-training's department for the officer's salary. Through the training program, SSATIN increases its staffing levels, and transmits its expertise in auto theft cases to others within suburban Cook County. SSATIN reports that since the training program began, the number of calls for assistance from local law enforcement has increased, along with the numbers of case openings, vehicle recoveries, and arrests. Originally a 90-day training, the program was expanded to 120 days in 2000. To date, sixteen officers have received the training.

From 1992 to 1999, SSATIN's service area included 53 communities within suburban Cook County. In 2000, the task force expanded its service area to include 18 additional communities in Cook County's western suburbs, an area known as the I-290 Eisenhower Corridor (see map below). To cover the expanded service area, SSATIN added seven investigators to its roster, bringing the total number of personnel to 24.



SSATIN works cooperatively with other Council-funded programs, as well as other law enforcement and insurance industry organizations. In recent years, SSATIN has conducted joint investigations with the DuPage County Auto Theft Task Force, the Secretary of State Special Audit Teams, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The task force has also worked with the Union Pacific Railroad and the National Insurance Crime Bureau. SSATIN is currently the only Council-funded program that investigates auto theft in suburban Cook County.

Program Activity

Since the program began in November 1992, through December 1999, the South Suburban Auto Theft Interdiction Network (SSATIN) has conducted 1,036

investigations, resulting in 915 persons arrested, 969 cases prosecuted, and 391 persons convicted. Figures 4 through 7 below indicate respectively the number of investigations, arrests, prosecutions, and convictions for each program year.⁶

Figure 4

**South Suburban Auto Theft
Interdiction Network (SSATIN)
Investigations 1993-1999**

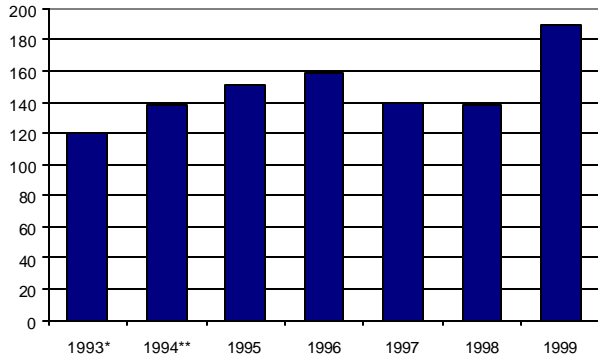


Figure 5

**South Suburban Auto Theft
Interdiction Network (SSATIN)
Persons Arrested 1993-1999**

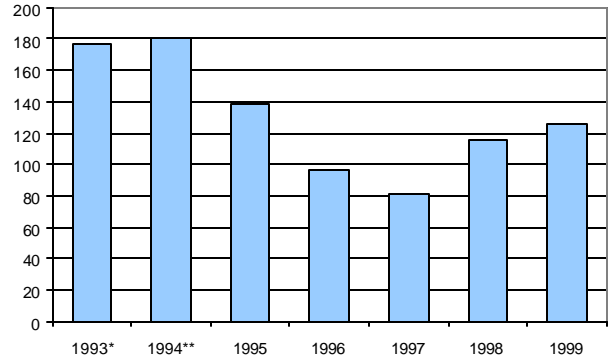


Figure 6

**South Suburban Auto Theft
Interdiction Network (SSATIN)
Cases Prosecuted 1993-1999**

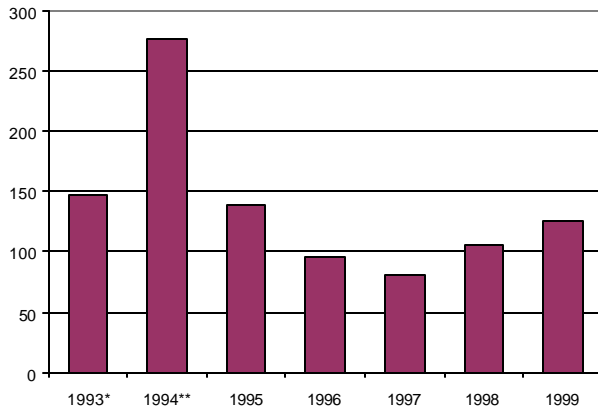
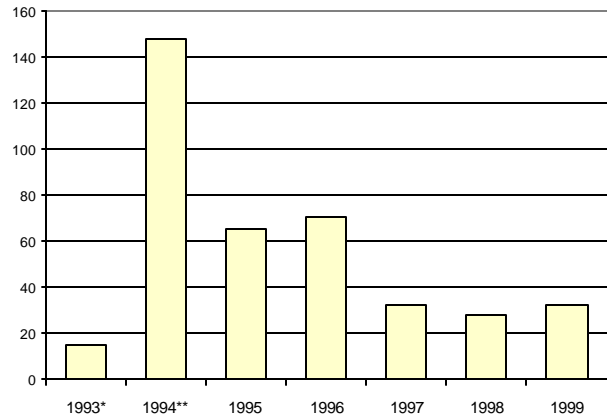


Figure 7

**South Suburban Auto Theft
Interdiction Network (SSATIN)
Persons Convicted 1993-1999**



* Includes data from SSATIN program inception in 11/92 through 10/93.

** Includes data from 11/93 through 12/94.

Source: SSATIN Monthly Performance Reports.

As seen in figures 6 and 7, in 1994 the task force had an increase in both the number of cases prosecuted and the number of persons convicted. Two factors account for this increase: first, the statistics for 1994 cover a grant period of fourteen rather than twelve months, from November 1993 to December 1994; second, during this period SSATIN's

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.

“Operation Crash for Cash” investigation resulted in the arrest of 30 individuals involved in a large car theft ring. The multiple cases brought against each of these individuals contribute to the rise in the 1994 prosecution and conviction statistics.

From 1992 through 1999, SSATIN recovered 1,172 vehicles worth an estimated \$17 million, including 1,004 cars, 41 trucks/buses, and 15 motorcycles. In addition, the task force recovered 4,893 vehicle parts with a total estimated value of \$1.6 million.

Funding Summary

The Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Act, which 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 South Suburban Auto Theft Interdiction Network (SSATIN) is funded by the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund. Figure 8 lists the amount granted to and expended by the task force for each program year. The increase in funding for 2000 includes an expansion of the task force’s service area as well as an extension of the auto theft investigation training program from 90 days to 120 days.⁸ Amounts are for calendar years (i.e., January through December) except where indicated.

Figure 9 summarizes SSATIN’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.

⁷ Chapter 20 Illinois Compiled Statutes 4005/2.

⁸ See Program Summary, pp. 4-5 of this report.

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
SSATIN Funding by Program Year

Year	Grant Amount	Expenditures
1993*	\$507,210	\$427,399
1994**	\$521,545	\$404,768
1995	\$502,284	\$406,235
1996	\$474,973	\$342,348
1997	\$480,405	\$284,209
1998	\$396,820	\$272,640
1999	\$473,491	\$434,884
2000	\$825,866	\$450,065 [†]
TOTAL	\$4,182,594	\$3,022,548

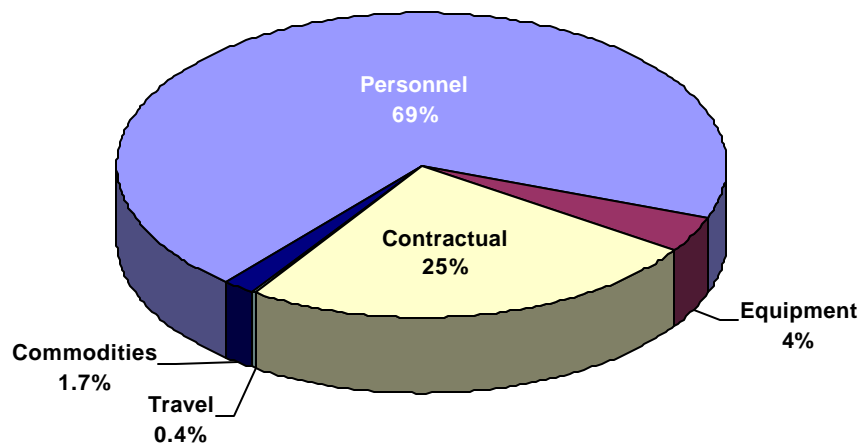
*November 1992 to October 1993.

**November 1993 to December 1994.

† January 2000 to October 2000.

Unexpended grant funds are returned to the Council.

Figure 9
South Suburban Auto Theft Interdiction Network
Percentage of Expenditures by Category*,
1992-2000



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

Conclusion

Since the South Suburban Auto Theft Interdiction Network began operation, vehicle thefts have declined within the task force's jurisdiction. From 1991 to 1999, motor vehicle thefts in the SSATIN service area decreased 36 percent, from 7,299 to 4,674. The rest of suburban Cook County saw a 35 percent decrease in vehicle theft during this period.

Data on the value of stolen vehicles is not available at the state or county level;⁹ however, the FBI estimates that the average value of a vehicle stolen in the United States in 1999 was \$6,104.¹⁰ Based on this value, the decrease in auto thefts in the SSATIN service area amounts to a saving of \$16 million.

From SSATIN has received a total of \$4.2 million in funding from the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund, and has recovered an estimated \$18.7 million in stolen vehicles and parts. Combining the recovery value with the savings from reduced auto theft, the task force has produced a \$34.8 million 'return' on its \$4.2 million in funding, a 'return rate' of more than \$8 for every \$1 of funding.

⁹ SSATIN 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 suburban Cook County.

¹⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2000. *Crime in the United States – 1999: Uniform Crime Reports*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
