

A Profile of the Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force



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**

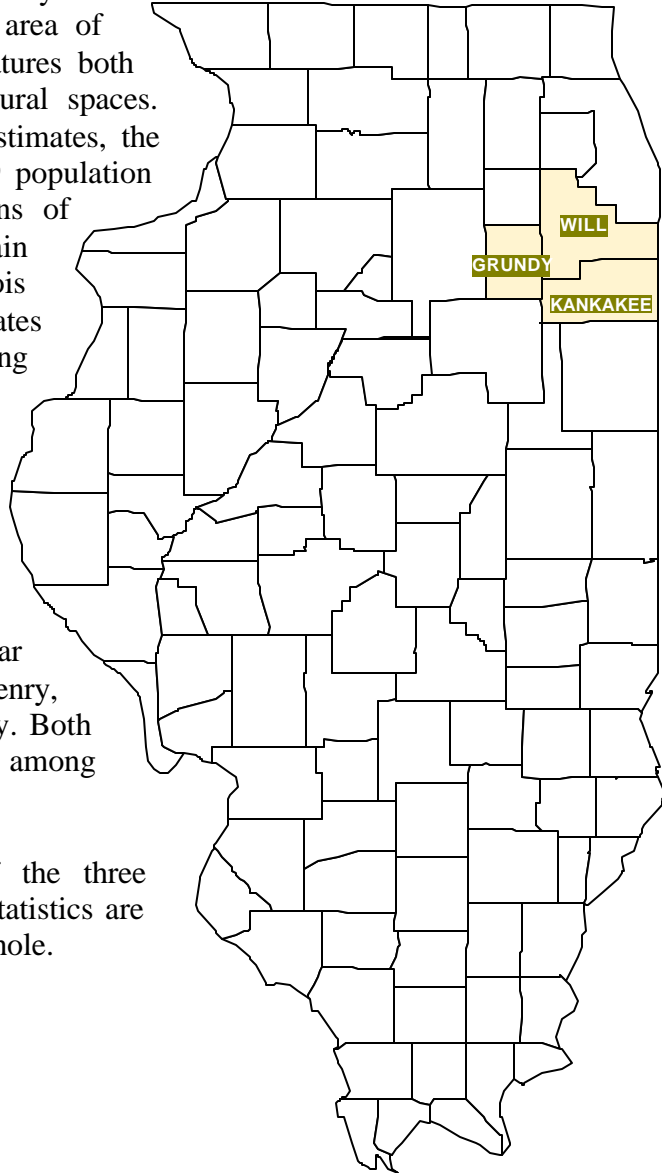
Introduction

The Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force serves Will, Kankakee, and Grundy Counties, including the cities of Bolingbrook, Joliet, Kankakee, and Romeoville. The tri-county area, located adjacent to Cook County in northeastern Illinois, covers a total area of 1,935 square miles. The region features both large population centers and vast rural spaces. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the three counties had a combined 1999 population of 618,293.¹ While the populations of Grundy and Kankakee Counties remain relatively stable, a Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission study indicates that Will County is the fastest-growing county in the state.²

There were 531,225 vehicles registered in the tri-county area in 1999, according to the Illinois Secretary of State's Office.³

Will County is one of the five collar counties (DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will) which border Cook County. Both Kankakee and Grundy Counties are among Illinois' 28 urban counties.

In this report, data from each of the three counties are analyzed together, and statistics are reported for the tri-county area as a whole.



¹ This is the most recent estimate available. *Population Estimates for Places: Annual Time Series, July 1, 1990 to July 1, 1999*. United States Bureau of the Census, March 2000.

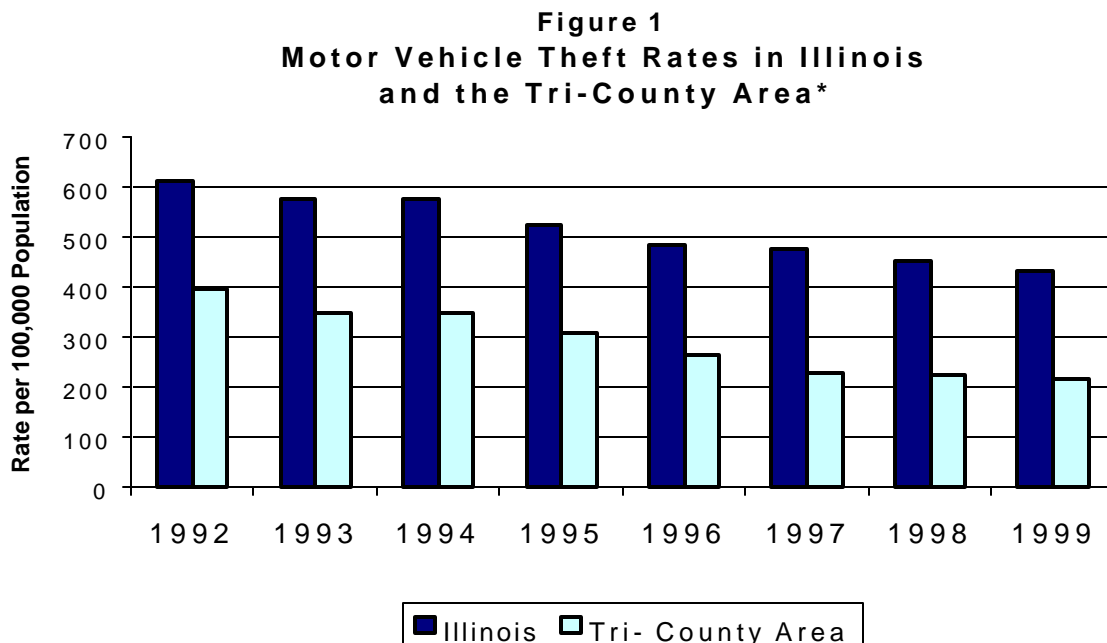
² *Toward 2020: Population, Household and Employment Forecasts For Counties and Municipalities in Northeastern Illinois*. Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, September 2000.

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 the Tri-County Area

According to the Illinois State Police, the number of motor vehicle thefts in the tri-county area decreased 30 percent between 1992 and 1999, from 1,915 thefts to 1,335 thefts. Motor vehicle thefts decreased 26 percent statewide during the same period.

Between 1992 and 1999, a time when the tri-county area's population was growing, the motor vehicle theft rate in the region decreased 45 percent, from 394 to 216 offenses per 100,000 population. Figure 1 shows the motor vehicle theft rate in Illinois and the tri-county area during this period.



*The Tri-County Area consists of Will, Kankakee, and Grundy Counties

Source: ICJIA Calculation using Illinois State Police and U.S. Census Bureau Data

Data reports from the Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force describe the following motor vehicle theft problems in the area:

- Drivers who give up their vehicles in exchange for drugs or sexual favors from prostitutes, then report the vehicle as stolen;
- Street gang members who steal cars for transportation or to facilitate other crimes such as drive-by shootings and transportation of drugs or firearms;
- Sophisticated fraud theft rings that purchase or lease vehicles using false identification and credit information;

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- Neighborhood auto mechanics who steal vehicles for parts needed to repair another vehicle (often for a single part);
 - Theft of earth moving and lawn equipment, and
 - Insurance fraud and false vehicle theft reports.

Program Summary

The Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force combats auto theft in Will, Kankakee, and Grundy 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 Will, Grundy, and Kankakee Counties, and the police departments of Joliet, Bolingbrook, Romeoville, and Kankakee City. The task force's multi-jurisdictional, cooperative approach maximizes its ability to investigate and prosecute auto theft in the Joliet metropolitan area. Implemented by the Joliet Police Department, the services of the task force are available to all law enforcement agencies within Will, Kankakee, and Grundy Counties

The Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force consists of eleven full time police officers, one National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) agent, three assistant state's attorneys (two from Will County and one from Kankakee County), and two clerical personnel. The unit conducts its activities from three regional offices, two in the city of Joliet and one in the city of Kankakee.

Task force investigators are specially trained in auto theft investigations and have statewide authority to pursue those investigations. The officers' advanced training in interviewing and interrogation techniques aims to improve the unit's rates of arrest and successful prosecution, especially in cases involving insurance fraud. The investigators spend as much time 'on the street' as possible, gathering intelligence, recruiting informants, targeting problem auto theft areas, arresting auto thieves and recovering stolen vehicles. The two assistant state's attorneys are available at all times to assist in the investigation and prosecution of the unit's cases.

Etching the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) on a vehicle's windows makes the vehicle less attractive to thieves, since the etched windows are easily traceable. Since 1997, the Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force has hosted VIN etching programs annually.

The task force also conducts auto theft training courses for patrol officers and public information seminars on "How Not to Be a Victim of Auto Theft." Since program inception, the unit has conducted seven law enforcement training courses and 33 seminars for Citizens' Police Academies and civic groups.

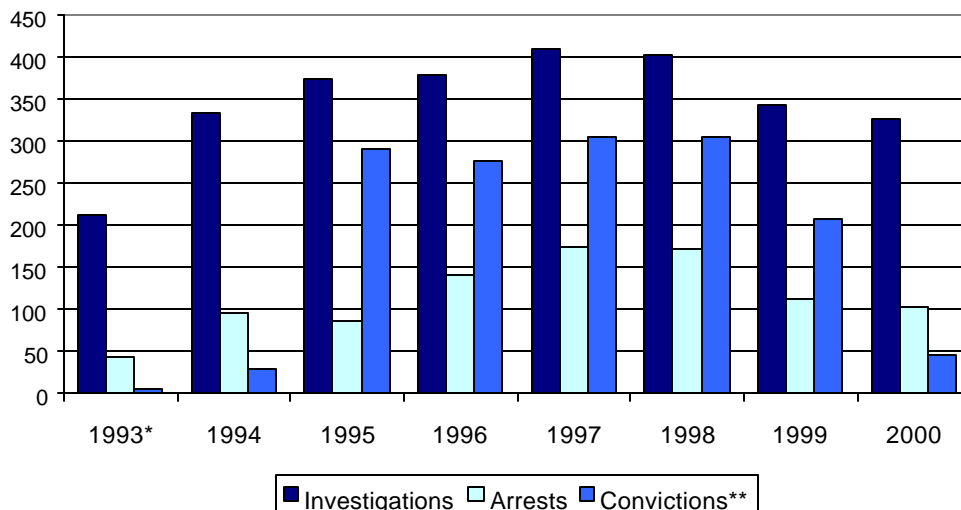
Program Activity

Since it began in September 1992, through December 2000, the Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force has conducted 2,783 investigations, resulting in 926 arrests and 1,463 convictions. Conviction data for 1995-1999 include all motor vehicle cases handled by the assistant state's attorneys assigned to the task force. 1993, 1994, and 2000 conviction data include only task force cases. Due to these differences in data reporting, the total number of convictions (1,463) is higher than the total number of arrests (926). Figure 2 shows the number of investigations, arrests, and convictions for each program year.

Since 1992, the task force has recovered 2,347 vehicles worth an estimated \$17.2 million. In addition, the task force has recovered vehicle parts and stolen cargo worth an estimated \$676,187.

The task force has also helped Will County, Kankakee County, and the city of Joliet develop policies and procedures to address rising numbers of false vehicle theft reports. In these jurisdictions, anyone reporting a stolen vehicle must sign a *Vehicle Theft Documentation Form*, a statement produced by the task force. By signing the form, the person filing the report indicates that they did not willingly give up control of the vehicle, and that they are aware that giving false information constitutes a felony. This prevents many false reports from being filed, and aids in prosecuting false theft reports, since the vehicle owner is informed that providing police with false information is a crime.

Figure 2
Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force
Investigations, Arrests, and Convictions



* Includes data from program inception in 9/92 through 12/93.

** Conviction data for 1995-1999 include all motor vehicle cases handled by the assistant state's attorneys assigned to the task force. 1993, 1994, and 2000 conviction data include only task force cases.

Source: Annual Performance Reports, Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force

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 Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force is funded by the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund. Figure 3 lists the amounts granted to and expended by the task force for each program year.

Figure 3
Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force
Funding by Program Year

Year	Grant Amount	Expenditures
1993*	\$399,972	\$399,865
1994**	\$686,857	\$548,078
1995	\$686,857	\$673,659
1996	\$618,164	\$603,222
1997	\$636,995	\$620,588
1998	\$659,674	\$652,025
1999	\$694,025	\$642,823
2000	\$726,293	\$648,536†
TOTAL	\$5,108,837	\$4,788,796

* September 1992 to August 1993.

**September 1993 to December 1994.

†January 2000 to November 2000.

Unexpended grant funds are returned to the Council.

Figure 4 summarizes the task force's expenditures from 1992 through 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.

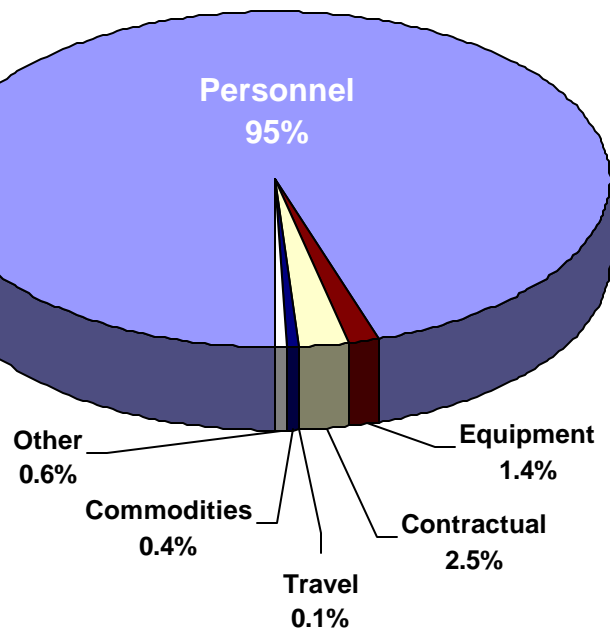
Commodities—includes consumable supplies (such as office supplies) and equipment costing less than \$50.

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 4
Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force
Percentage of Expenditures by Category*
1992-2000



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

Conclusion

Since the Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force began operation, vehicle thefts have declined within the task force's jurisdiction. From 1992 to 1999, motor vehicle thefts in the tri-county area decreased 30 percent, from 1,915 to 1,335.

Data on the value of stolen vehicles is not available at the state or county level;⁴ however, the FBI estimates that the average value of a vehicle stolen in the United States in 1999 was \$6,104.⁵ Based on this value, the decrease in auto thefts in the tri-county area amounts to a saving of \$3.5 million.

The task force has received a total of \$5.1 million in funding from the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund, and has recovered an estimated \$17.8 million in stolen vehicles, cargo, and parts. Combining the recovery value with the savings from reduced auto theft, the task force has produced a \$21.4 million 'return' on its \$5.1 million in funding, a 'return rate' of more than \$4 for every \$1 of funding.

⁴ 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 tri-county area.

⁵ This is the most recent estimate available. *Crime in the United States – 1999: Uniform Crime Reports*. Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2000.