

A Profile of the Tri-County 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**

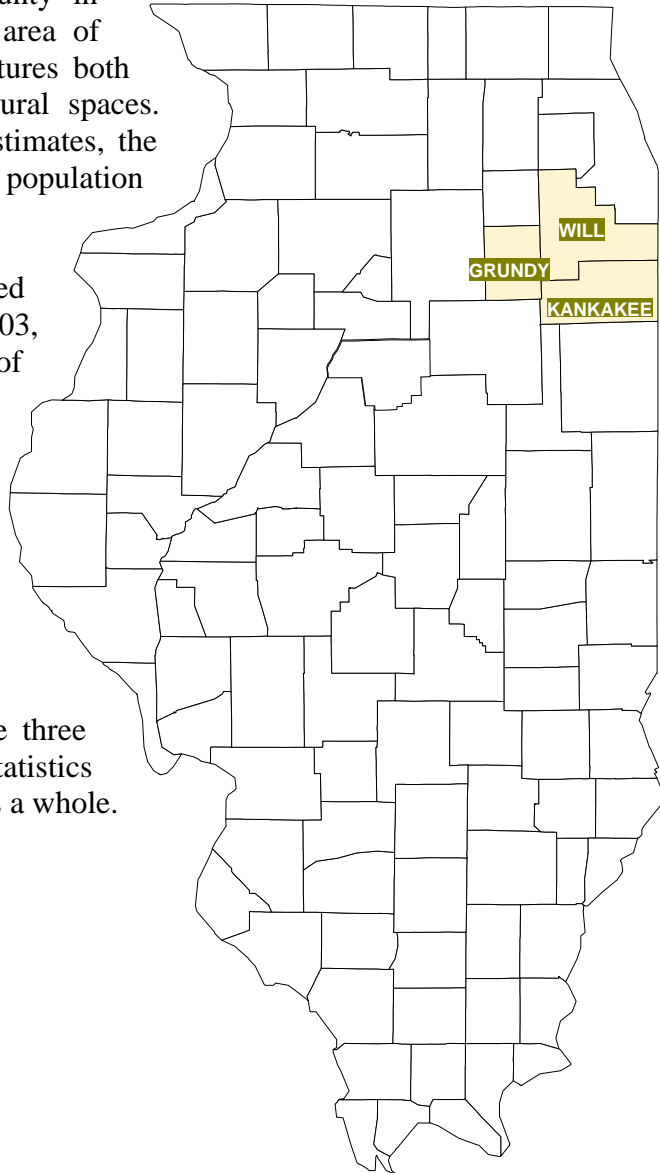
Introduction

The 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 2002 population of 703,357.¹

There were 530,378 vehicles registered in the Tri-County area in 2003, according to the Illinois Secretary of State's Office.²

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 United States Census Bureau. 2004.

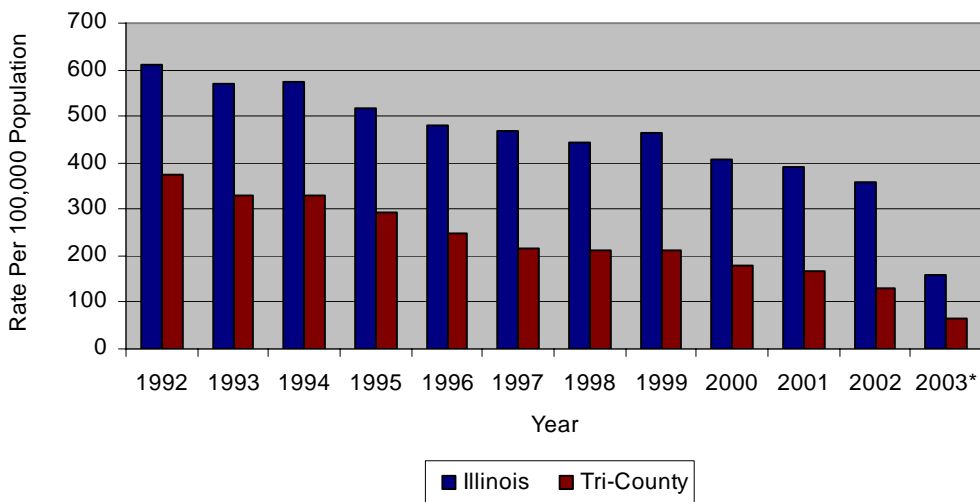
² State of Illinois, Office of the Secretary of State. 2003. *County Statistical Report for Motor Vehicle License Unites and Transactions*.

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 53 percent between 1992 and 2002, from 1,915 thefts to 903 thefts. Motor vehicle thefts decreased 36 percent statewide during the same period. Preliminary data between January and June 2003 show 677 motor vehicle thefts in the Tri-County area, while there were 19,962 auto thefts across Illinois.

Between 1992 and 2002, a time when the Tri-County area's population was growing, the motor vehicle theft rate in the region decreased 66 percent, from 376 to 128 offenses per 100,000 population. The statewide motor vehicle theft rate similarly decreased, from 609 to 359 offenses per 100,000 during the same time period. According to preliminary data, there were 67 offenses per 100,000 in the Tri-County 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 Tri-County area during this period.

Figure 1
Motor Vehicle Theft Rate
1992-2003



Data Source: Illinois Uniform Crime Reports

*January-June, 2003 Preliminary ISP data

In 2001, the Tri-County Task Force reported that their major problem areas were the theft of cargo and trailers. The task force reported that Joliet, Romeoville, and Bolingbrook have experienced an increase in trucking terminals and warehouses. The task force is also anticipating future crime as a result of the opening of the nation's largest intermodal freight facility in Elwood in 2002. In addition, data reports from the task force describe the following motor vehicle theft problems in the area:

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- Drivers who give up their vehicles in exchange for drugs or sexual favors from prostitutes, then report the vehicle as stolen;
 - Rental Car Thefts,
 - Keys from car dealerships being illegally cut,
 - Sophisticated fraud theft rings that purchase or lease vehicles using false identification and credit information;
 - Keys left in vehicles, unsecured, with engine running;
 - Thefts of construction equipment, lawn tractors, and all terrain vehicles; 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 in the Tri-County Area.

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

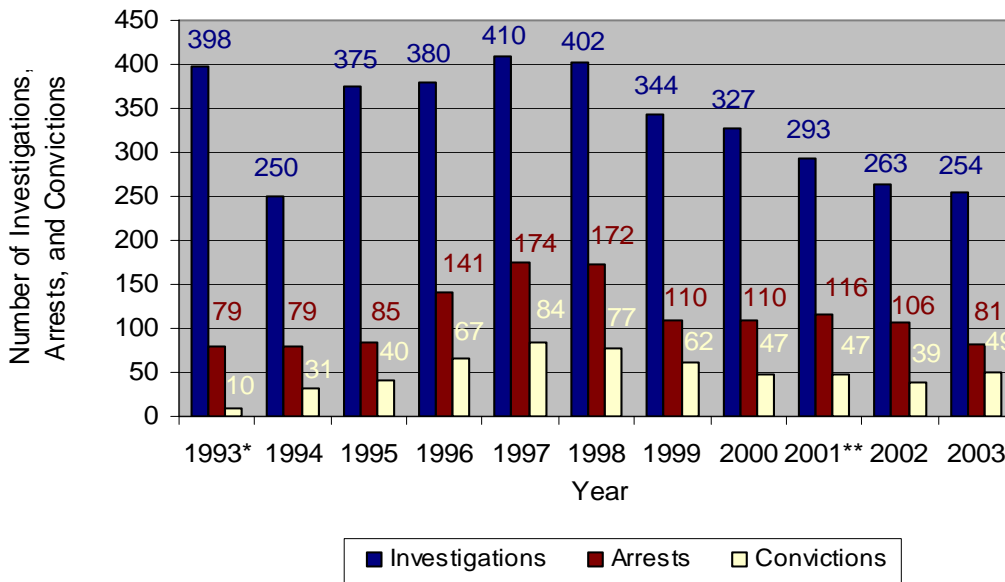
Program Activity

Since the program began in August 1992, through December 2002, the Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force has conducted 3,442 self-initiated and assisted investigations, resulting in 1,172 arrests and 504 convictions. In 2003, the task force has continued to investigate motor vehicle theft cases and provided assistance to law enforcement personnel in Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties. The task force has conducted 254 investigations (125 self-initiated and 129 assisted investigations), resulting in 81 arrests and 49 convictions. Figure 2 shows the number of investigations, arrests, and convictions for each program year.

From August 1992 thru December 2003, the task force has recovered 3,045 vehicles worth an estimated \$24 million. Figure 3 shows the number of vehicle recoveries made by the task force for each year.

Figure 2

Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force Investigations, Arrests, and Convictions 1993-2003

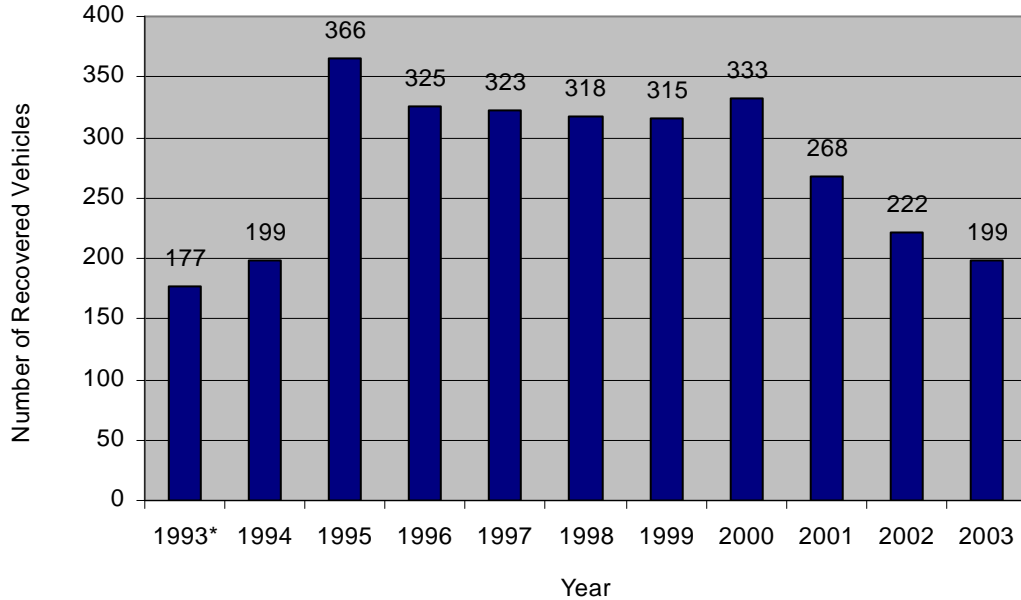


*The 1993 data covers the period from August 1992 to December 1993.

**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

**Tri-County Motor Vehicle Recoveries
1993-2003**



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

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 originally 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.

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 4 lists the amounts granted to and expended by the task force for each program year.

Table 1
Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force
Funding by Program Year

Year	Grant Amount	Expenditures
1993	\$399,972	\$399,865
1994	\$555,278	\$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	\$714,422
2001	\$746,575	\$737,490
2002	\$806,594	\$794,473
2003	\$788,984	\$781,960
TOTAL	\$7,319,411	\$7,168,603

*Note: Unexpended grant funds are returned to the Council

Figure 4 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.

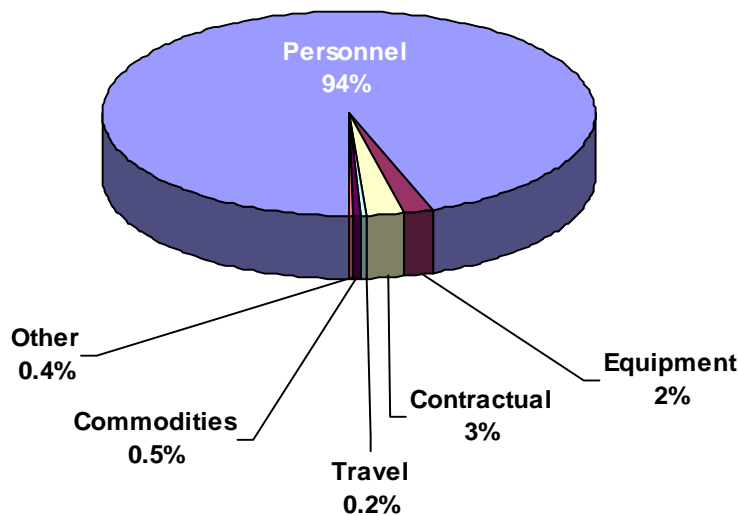
Commodities—includes consumable supplies (such as office supplies) and equipment costing less than \$50.

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
Tri-County 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 Tri-County Auto Theft Task Force began operation, vehicle thefts have declined within the task force's jurisdiction. From 1992 to 2002, motor vehicle thefts in the Tri-County area decreased 53 percent, from 1,915 to 903. Preliminary data by the Illinois State Police shows that between January and June 2003, there were 677 motor vehicle thefts in the Tri-County area.

Data on the value of stolen vehicles is 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 1,012 auto thefts in the Tri-County area amounts to a saving of approximately \$6.8 million.

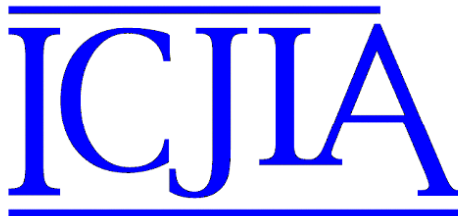
The task force has received a total of \$7.3 million in funding from the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund, and has recovered an estimated \$24 million in stolen vehicles, cargo, and parts. Combining the recovery value with the savings from reduced auto theft, the task force has produced a \$24 million 'return' on its \$7.3 million in funding, a 'return rate' of nearly \$3.50 for every \$1 of funding.

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 theft recoveries within the Tri-County 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