



Henrico Police Auto Theft Task Force



Project Contact Information



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Division of Police
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Summary

The Henrico Division of Police has experienced a constant level of reported auto thefts since 1997, despite a reduction in other Part I crimes. As a result, a three person Auto Theft Task Force was created in October 1999. Previously, a single detective was responsible for the investigation of approximately seven hundred reported auto thefts per year. The task force was created to reduce the overall quantity of thefts and increase the investigative clearance rate. To accomplish this task, dual strategies of selective enforcement and prevention programs were implemented.

Four enforcement efforts were initiated. The first initiative addressed the Division's inability to capture recovery information. Recovery location, time and date data was not accessible in the Division's mainframe computer. This obstacle prevented an analysis of the information to recognize theft trends (i.e. chop shops, theft rings, etc.) and allow for theft forecasting. The Henrico County Data Processing Center and the Division of Police Criminal Records Unit were contacted about the situation. Meetings were conducted with each party to develop and implement policy changes and still comply with reporting criteria to the Virginia State Police and the FBI.

The second initiative involved the identification of high theft corridors and the enforcement of applicable laws. Six areas were identified. As a result, eight individuals were arrested on sixty-five felony charges related to vehicle theft.

The third initiative addressed the dilemma of prosecuting passengers in a stolen vehicle. This project primarily impacted the actions of juvenile joy riders. The Commonwealth's Attorney was

contacted for his opinion as to the feasibility of charging passengers with unauthorized use of the vehicle. After approval by the Commonwealth's Attorney, a letter was addressed to each of the judges of the Circuit Court, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and the General District Court.

The last initiative involved the random inspection of salvage dealers in the Metro-Richmond area. Two dealers were selected based on the volume of vehicles at their site and the dealers access to crushing/shredding machinery. Approximately seventeen hundred cars were inspected and researched for titling information.

Several prevention programs were designed to directly address the quantity of reported auto thefts. Two very successful programs incorporated Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) Etching as a theft prevention measure. The goal of the program was to deter the professional auto thief from exporting the vehicle, re-identifying the vehicle, or selling the vehicle glass through a "chop shop". The first VIN etching program was conducted at the Henrico County Public Safety Fair on October 23, 1999. Twenty-four vehicles were chemically etched with their respective vehicle identification numbers. The second program was conducted at Virginia Center Commons (Shopping Mall) on April 8, 2000. The VIN was etched on ninety-six vehicles during the event.

In a cooperative effort with the Virginia State Police Help Eliminate Auto Theft (H.E. A.T.) Program and the Henrico Division of Police, two auto theft prevention programs were conducted. The first program utilized the H.E.A.T. Trailer at the Richmond International Raceway for the fall 1999 Winston NASCAR Race. Prevention items such as key chains, pencils, pens, brochures, can coolers, and water bottles were distributed to those in attendance.

The H.E. A.T. vehicle and trailer were included in a pre-race parade before 106,000 spectators. The second program occurred on April 1, 2000, at The Shops at Willow Lawn (Shopping Mall) for the annual Police Appreciation Day. The H.E.A.T. vehicle and a display board were utilized to convey auto theft prevention measures. Promotional items and brochures were distributed to those in attendance.

In an ongoing effort to address auto theft issues at the local level, a Henrico Division of Police crime prevention brochure was created. The brochure provides information on layering a vehicle with protection, the "Do's and Don'ts" to thwart thieves, chop shops, and advise to protect oneself during a car jacking. The brochure has been distributed to businesses, civic groups, rental car agencies, car dealerships, and it has provided to the Uniform Operations section for distribution to the general public.

Rental car agencies and car dealerships are common targets of the auto thief in Henrico County. In response, an advisory was created for distribution to rental car agencies in the Metro-Richmond area. The advisory was forwarded to the Retail Merchants Association for distribution to business members prior to the 1999 Christmas season. In addition, a flier was created for distribution to the new/used car dealerships within Henrico County. The flier was distributed with the Division's crime prevention brochure by agency Community Officers.

As a result of the enforcement and prevention efforts of the Auto Theft Task Force, reported incidents of auto theft have declined twenty-four percent over the previous year. Twenty-eight individuals were arrested for a total of ninety-four offenses between October 13, 1999 and March 31, 2000.

Description

The County of Henrico borders the City of Richmond (the capital of Virginia) on the west, north, and east. At 244 square miles, the county constitutes approximately one-third of the metropolitan Richmond area and over a quarter-million residents live within the county. The many historic sites within the county and region offer tourists a wide range of attractions. Henrico County is at the crossroads of Interstate 95 and Interstate 64. Richmond International Airport is located centrally within the county and offers both passenger and cargo transportation. The airport is home to the following rental car agencies: Dollar, Thrifty, Budget, National, Avis, and Hertz. In addition to the airport, Henrico County also offers rail transportation through Amtrak and CSX. Each year Richmond International Raceway (NASCAR) and the Virginia State Fair bring hundreds of thousands of spectators to Henrico County, Millions of cars travel annually within the county.

A review of the departments auto theft statistics was conducted in mid 1999. It revealed the Henrico Division of Police had experienced a constant level of reported auto thefts since 1997, despite a reduction in other Part I crimes. During 1997, 710 cars were reported stolen and 756 cars were reported stolen during 1998. Next, an analysis of auto theft types was conducted by members of the Auto Theft Task Force, Intelligence Unit, and Uniform Operations. Categories of theft included false claims (i.e. marital disputes, misplaced vehicles, etc.) and fraudulent claims (i.e. insurance fraud, hit and run, "scapegoat" thefts, etc.). However, juvenile joyriding and professional thefts were the most prominent and also viewed as a primary concern to public safety. In particular, the

actions of juvenile offenders posed a direct threat to the physical well being of any vehicle operators and pedestrians within the county. As a result, a three person Auto Theft Task Force was created in October 1999. Previously, a single detective was responsible for the investigation of all the reported auto thefts per year. The task force was created to reduce the overall quantity of thefts and increase the investigative clearance rate. To accomplish this task, dual strategies of selective enforcement and prevention programs were implemented.

Enforcement

Data Processing, Recovery Information

The first initiative addressed the Division's inability to capture recovery information. Recovery location, time and date data was not accessible in Division's mainframe computer. This obstacle prevented an analysis on the information to recognize theft trends (i.e. chop shops, theft rings, etc.) and allow for theft forecasting. As a result, the Henrico County Data Processing Center and the Division of Police Criminal Records Unit were contacted about the situation. Meetings were conducted with each party to develop and implement policy changes while still complying with reporting criteria for the Virginia State Police and the FBI. A Data Processing employee compiled the criteria for implementation and subsequently altered the computer software to permit the capture of the recovery information. Next, members of Computer Operations and the Intelligence Unit for the Division of Police altered report parameters to address the new changes. The result of this initiative is the capability to document and map (Attachment 1) the

Prevention

Henrico County Public Safety Fair, VIN Etching.

Several prevention programs were designed to directly address the quantity of reported auto thefts. Two very successful programs incorporated Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) Etching as a theft prevention measure. The goal of the program is to deter the professional auto thief from exporting the vehicle, re-identifying the vehicle, or selling the vehicle glass through a "chop shop". This is achieved by chemically etching the vehicle identification number on the vehicle's glass (up to eleven sections). A professional thief would have to replace all the etched glass in the vehicle in order to conceal the vehicle's identity. Such an action would be time consuming and cost prohibitive. The first VIN etching program was conducted at the Henrico County Public Safety Fair on October 23, 1999. Twenty-four vehicles were chemically etched with the respective vehicle identification number (Attachment 3A, 3B, and 3C).

Virginia Center Commons, VIN Etching.

The second VIN etching program was conducted at Virginia Center Commons (Shopping Mall) on April 8, 2000. The mall is at the intersection of U.S. Route 1 and I-95. The program was promoted in advance through local public service announcements, the distribution of fliers at local civic events, and a live broadcast on a local television station (WRIC, Channel 8). Virginia Department of Transportation message boards, directional signs, and banners were utilized on the day of the event to direct traffic from the roadway to the mall. As a result, the VIN was etched on 96 vehicles during the event. The event

was sponsored in conjunction with the Virginia State Police H.E.A.T. program and the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles. Community Officers representing the response areas surrounding the mall also participated in the program. In addition to the free VIN etching, brochures and promotional items on auto theft prevention were distributed to those participating in the program (Attachment 4A and 4B).

Fall 1999 NASCAR Race at Richmond International Raceway.

In a cooperative effort with the Virginia State Police Help Eliminate Auto Theft (H.E.A.T.) Program and the Henrico Division of Police, two auto theft prevention programs were conducted. The first program utilized the H.E.A.T. Trailer at the Richmond International Raceway for the fall 1999 Winston NASCAR Race (Attachment 5). Promotional items on auto theft prevention, such as key chains, pencils, pens, brochures, can coolers, and water bottles were distributed to those in attendance. The H.E.A.T. vehicle and trailer were included in a pre-race parade before 106,000 spectators.

The Shops at Willow Lawn, Police Appreciation Day.

The second event conducted in conjunction with the H.E.A.T. Program occurred on April 1, 2000 at The Shops at Willow Lawn (Shopping Center) for the annual Police Appreciation Day. The H.E.A.T. vehicle was on display for examination during the program (Attachment 6A and 6B). A display board was utilized to convey information on the H.E.A.T. program and disseminate statistics on auto theft within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Brochures and handouts were provided to give advice on theft prevention measures. Promotional items, such as water bottles, key chains, ice

scrappers, and pens/pencils were distributed to those in attendance. In addition, auto theft prevention videos created by Metro-Richmond law enforcement agencies were displayed.

Auto Theft Prevention Brochure

In an ongoing effort to address auto theft issues at the local level, a Henrico Division of Police crime prevention brochure was created (Attachment 7). The brochure provides information on layering a vehicle with protection, the "Do's and Don'ts" to thwart thieves, chop shop operations, and advise to protect oneself during a carjacking. The brochure has been distributed to local businesses, civic groups, rental car agencies, and car dealerships. In addition, Uniform Operations Officers have distributed the brochure to the general public and victims of auto theft.

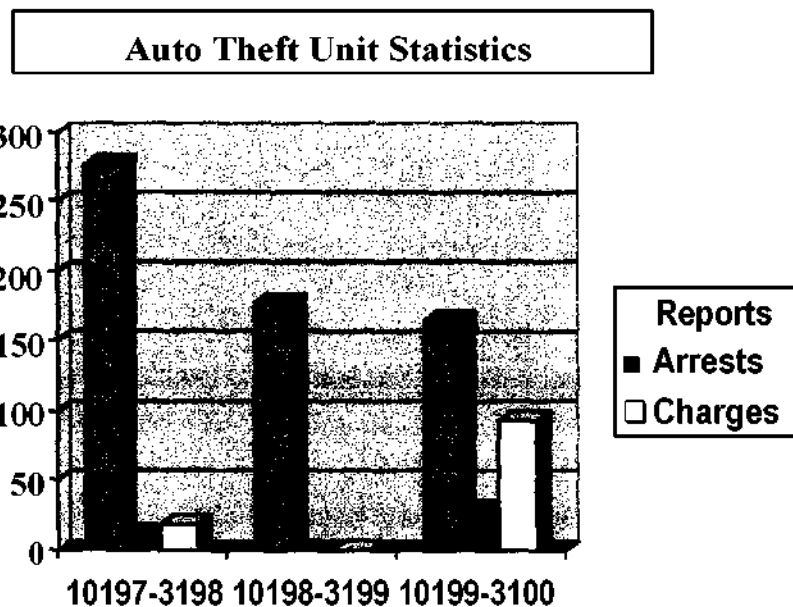
Car Dealership Flier 1 Rental Car Agency Advisory

Rental car agencies and car dealerships are common targets of the auto thief in Henrico County because of the large number of car agencies supported by tourism and trade from the international airport, historic sites and the junction of I-95 and 1-64. In response, an advisory flier was created for distribution to rental car agencies in the Metro-Richmond area. The advisory was forwarded to William H. Baxter, President of the Retail Merchants Association of Greater Richmond, for distribution to business members prior to the 1999 Christmas season (Attachment 8A and 8B). In addition, the flier was distributed to the new/used car dealerships within Henrico County's two police districts. The two primary conditions supporting vehicle thefts for dealerships and car rental agencies are key control issues and the establishment of proper renter identification. The

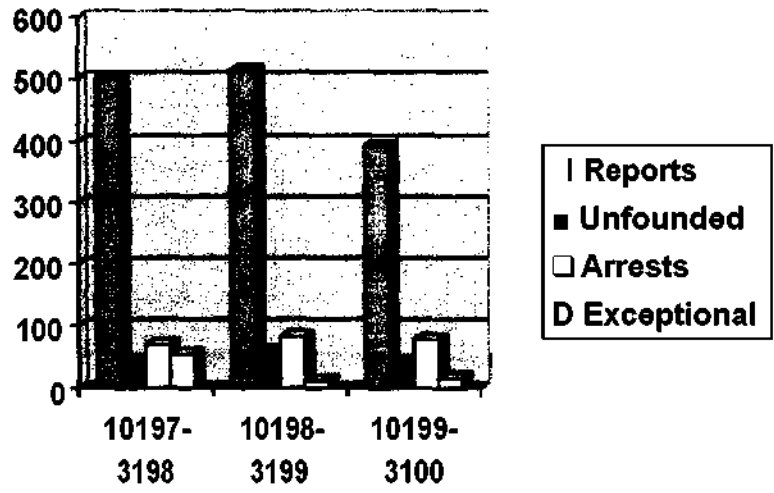
flier addressed theft schemes such as key switches and the use of false identification by members of organized crime groups to rent/lease vehicles. The flier was distributed with the Division's crime prevention brochure by agency Community Officers and members of the Auto Theft Task Force.

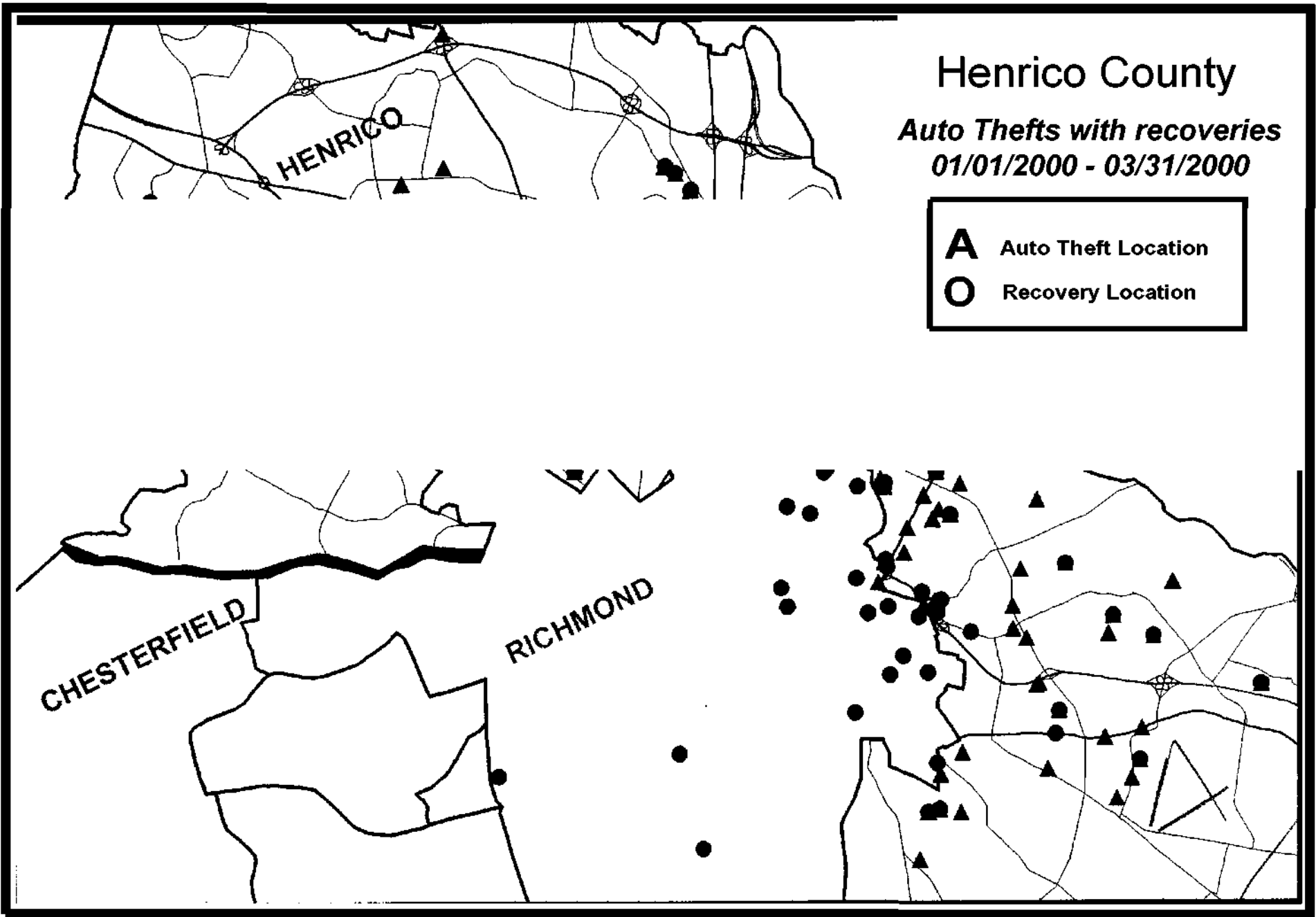
Conclusion

As a result of the enforcement and prevention efforts of the Auto Theft Task Force, reported incidents of auto theft have declined twenty-four percent over the previous year. Twenty-eight individuals were arrested for a total of ninety-four offenses between October 13, 1999 and March 31, 2000. The presentation of auto theft prevention events and the VIN etching programs have strengthened relations with the community and promoted the community's participation in auto theft reduction. In addition, the selective enforcement of high theft corridors has provided a more efficient allocation of division resources and resulted in an improvement of services to the community. An additional benefit is an increase in intelligence information and theft/recovery information that is communicated to surrounding jurisdictions.



Division Statistics





Henrico County

Auto Thefts with recoveries
01/01/2000 - 03/31/2000

- A** Auto Theft Location
- O** Recovery Location