

Phoenix Drops to Number 2

California Leads the Nation in Auto Theft Rates: Car Thieves Strike Gold in the Golden State

The ten metropolitan statistical areas with the highest vehicle theft rates were:

1. Modesto CA
2. Phoenix-Mesa AZ
3. Stockton-Lodi CA
4. Las Vegas NV
5. Sacramento CA
6. Fresno CA
7. Oakland CA
8. Miami FL
9. San Diego CA
10. Detroit MI

The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) reported at the end of 2004 that for calendar year 2003, car thieves were most active in California. Six of the nation's ten hottest spots for vehicle theft rates are in California, while the remaining four are Phoenix-Mesa, AZ; Las Vegas, NV; Miami, FL; and Detroit, MI.

According to Hot Spots 2003, its annual report on auto thefts, NICB reviewed data supplied by the FBI for each of the country's 336 metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). MSAs are designated by the Office of Management and Budget using Census 2000 data, and may include areas surrounding a specific city. For example, the number one Hot Spot in the current report is Modesto, CA. The Modesto MSA, however, includes data not only from the city of Modesto, but the entire county of Stanislaus in which Modesto is located.

The rate is determined by the number of vehicle theft offenses per 100,000 inhabitants. When compared with the data from 2002, Hot Spots 2003 contains some good news as well. For example, the MSAs of Seattle and Tacoma, WA (numbers nine and ten, respectively in 2002) fell from the top ten list completely, and replaced by newcomers San Diego, CA and Detroit, MI, ninth and tenth place, respectively.

Meanwhile, Phoenix-Mesa, AZ dropped from first to second place and Miami, FL moved from sixth to eighth place.

After declining steadily through 1999, vehicle thefts began creeping upward in 2000 with a dramatic increase in 2001. In 2001, an estimated 1,228,391 vehicles were stolen which was an increase of 68,389 thefts over 2000. In 2003, an estimated 1,260,471 vehicles were reported stolen which was an increase of 13,825 from 2002. So while the incidents of theft are up, the rate of increase has been trending in a positive direction.

"The victim of a vehicle theft is hardly consoled by positive statistical trends," advises NICB President and Chief Executive Officer Robert M. Bryant. "With over 1.2 million vehicles stolen annually in the United States, the loss to owners and insurance companies is over \$8 billion. That amount of money makes it a lucrative endeavor for organized rings and professional operators. With recovery rates dropping, that signals the more insidious problems of exportation and surgical dismantlement—the former feeds the foreign demand for vehicles, while the latter feeds the domestic black market for replacement parts.

"NICB has teamed with law enforcement entities at border areas and elsewhere, and is actively engaged in a number of vehicle theft education, enforcement, and recovery operations throughout the United States, Mexico, and Canada," Mr. Bryant said.

NICB recommends the following actions under its "layered approach" to protection that automobile owners can take to minimize their risk and prevent their car from becoming the next statistic:

Common Sense—An unlocked vehicle with a key in the ignition is an open invitation to any thief, regardless of which anti-theft device you use. The common sense approach to protection is the simplest and most cost-effective way to thwart would-be thieves. Secure your vehicle even if parking for brief periods. You should always:

- Remove your keys from the ignition
- Lock your doors /close your windows
- Park in a well-lit area

Warning Device—The second layer of protection is a visible or audible device which alerts thieves that your vehicle is protected. Popular second layer devices include:

- Audible alarms
- Steering column collars
- Steering wheel/Brake pedal lock
- Brake locks
- Wheel locks
- Tire locks/Tire deflators
- Theft deterrent decals
- Identification markers in or on vehicle

- Window etching

Immobilizing Device—The third layer of protection is a device which prevents thieves from bypassing your ignition and hot-wiring the vehicle. Some electronic devices have computer chips in ignition keys. Other devices inhibit the flow of electricity or fuel to the engine until a hidden switch or button is activated. Popular third layer devices include:

- Smart keys
- Fuse cut-offs
- Kill switches
- Starter, ignition, and fuel disablers

Tracking Device—The final layer of protection is a tracking device which emits a signal to a police or monitoring station when the vehicle is reported stolen. Tracking devices are very effective in helping authorities recover stolen vehicles.

The National Insurance Crime Bureau is the nation's premier non-profit organization exclusively dedicated to fighting insurance fraud and vehicle theft for the benefit of its customers and the public through information analysis, forecasting, criminal investigation support, training, and public awareness.

Anyone with information concerning auto theft and insurance fraud can report it anonymously by calling toll-free 1-800-TEL-NICB (1-800-835-6422).

For more information, visit <http://www.nicb.org/> ■