



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Annual Puffer Week Drives Home Need for Auto Theft Awareness

New Statewide Survey: Public Perception Out-of-Step with the Reality of Colorado's Serious Auto Theft Problem

Denver, Colo. (Jan. 27, 2014) — Coloradans Against Auto Theft (CAAT) and Colorado Auto Theft Investigators (CATI) once again team up for this year's "Puffer Week," slated for Jan. 27–31. The weeklong statewide awareness and enforcement push aims to educate the public about the risks, dangers and heightened crime associated with auto theft, specifically "puffers" - cars left running unattended.

A January 2014 statewide survey conducted by Talmey-Drake Research on behalf of CAAT, shows over half of respondents say they know someone who has had their car stolen; yet only 26% expressed concern that their own car might be stolen. And while 70% of Coloradans think a running car left unattended is a top way cars get stolen, nearly a quarter say they've done it.

"What this new poll tells us is that the majority of Colorado drivers still think of car theft as something that happens to everyone BUT them," says Carole Walker, Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Association and CAAT co-chair. "It's this skew in perception and the increasingly dangerous outcomes of auto theft that drive our statewide education efforts. We see an increase in the awareness that "puffing" is illegal, but people still don't think their car will be stolen and admit they sometimes take their chances just to warm up their car."

"Puffers" accounted for nearly 15% of all auto thefts in 2013, averaging seven stolen vehicles per day, 35 per week. Not surprisingly, cold-season months, with the peak month being January, produced the highest number of "puffer" thefts. (Source: Auto Theft Intelligence Coordination Center)

As part of Colorado's auto theft prevention efforts, the Attorney General's Auto Theft Initiative fully supports "Puffer Week" and the strong public partnership driving its efforts. "CATI partners with CAAT to localize enforcement efforts and bring personal awareness and accountability to the rising auto theft problem," says Dana Chavez, Colorado Attorney General's Criminal Investigator II, Special Prosecutions/Auto Theft and President of CATI. "Last year, 11,304 cars were reported stolen, and increasingly we are seeing auto theft as a gateway to other violent and drug-related crimes. It takes a combination of law enforcement working together with the public to combat and prevent auto theft."

As part of continued education efforts initiated by CAAT's Lockdown campaign earlier this winter, "Puffer Week" activities will roll out statewide through the distribution of informational fliers and Lockdown-branded ice scrapers, along with an increase in issued warnings and citations to those who leave their cars running unattended.

Poll results indicate many Coloradans perceive auto theft as a crime enabling joyriding and the stripping down and selling of car parts, but the reality is auto theft is fueled by other more dangerous motives and activities.

"While leaving your car running unattended to warm up doesn't seem like a big risk, earlier this month we had a stolen 'puffer' vehicle that was used in illegal street racing and ultimately resulted in the tragic death of a teenager in Aurora," says Jeff Turner, Traffic Section Lieutenant with the city of Aurora. "It's a sad reminder that stolen vehicles are often used to commit serious crimes and another reason to think twice before making your car an easy target for a thief."

Significant findings from 2014 statewide survey by Talmey-Drake Research (on behalf of CAAT):

- 66% know that leaving a car running while unattended is illegal (only 53% were aware in the same study conducted in 2011).
- Only 18% of those who almost never or never leave their car running unattended say it's because their afraid it will get stolen; 70% simply believe it's not a good thing to do.
- The sheer fact that each year more than 10,000 vehicles are stolen statewide has little or no affect on 70% of Coloradans.

Snapshot of "Puffer Week" Activities:

East Metro Auto Theft Team (EMATT)

Law enforcement will be conducting puffer operations from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., Tuesday through Friday. EMATT will work closely with Aurora Police Department, Commerce City Police Department, Englewood Police Department and the Arapahoe County Sheriffs Department. On Tuesday, Jan. 28, Aurora PIOs will live tweet during the morning operation. Follow @AuroraPD for updates.

Englewood Police Department

A Community Relations Specialist will take to the streets to visit with citizens every morning and hand out educational materials.

Metropolitan Auto Theft Task Force (MATT)

Agencies will hand out literature and educate one-on-one contacts.

Grand Junction Police Department

Educational materials will be available to citizens. Advocates are working with local businesses to help spread the word.

Mesa County Sheriff's Office

Educational materials will be available to citizens.

What can the public do?

- Never leave your car running unattended.
- Always lock your car.
- Never leave any keys in the car, even a spare set.
- Never leave valuables in plain sight.
- Always park in well-lit, high-traffic areas.
- Get windows, doors and fenders etched with the VIN.
- Consider installing a tracking and recovery device.
- Check out www.lockdownyourcar.org for more prevention tips, local statistics and a Hot Spot map with geo-locator tool allowing users to search auto theft in their area.

Media ride-alongs available upon request.

For ride-along opportunities, please contact your local law enforcement or Colorado State Patrol PIOs or Christine Carter on behalf of Coloradans Against Auto Theft at 303-832-2700 ext. 224.

Colorado auto theft task forces, made up of regional law enforcement agencies, Colorado State Patrol and other motor vehicle safety and insurance partners, are a part of the CAAT coalition to decrease auto theft during this peak auto theft season.

CAAT Coalition Partners

- Beat Auto Theft Through Law Enforcement (BATTLE)
- Metropolitan Auto Theft Task Force (MATT)
- Southern Colorado Motor Vehicle Theft Task Force
- Western Colorado Auto Theft Task Force (WCATT)
- East Metro Auto Theft Team (EMATT)
- Commerce City/Thornton/Adams County Auto Theft Prevention Program

- Attorney General's Auto Theft Prosecution Initiative
- Colorado Auto Theft Investigators (CATI)
- Coloradans Against Auto Theft (CAAT)
- Auto Theft Intelligence Coordination Center (ATICC)
- San Luis Valley

About Coloradans Against Auto Theft (CAAT):

Coloradans Against Auto Theft (CAAT) is a statewide auto theft prevention initiative to raise awareness about the problem and educate the public on what they can do to reduce their chances of falling victim to auto theft. CAAT is a coalition of law enforcement agencies, the Colorado State Patrol, insurance partners, LoJack and AAA Colorado. CAAT and the state auto theft task force efforts are funded in part by the Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority (CATPA).

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