



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2016 Puffer Week Combines Education and Enforcement to Combat Auto Theft

New Auto Theft Poll: Majority of Coloradans agree leaving cars running unattended is a top way cars get stolen, but 34% admit to leaving their car puffing even though it's dangerous and illegal.

Denver, Colo. (Jan. 24, 2016) — Coloradans Against Auto Theft (CAAT), in partnership with Colorado Auto Theft Investigators (CATI), unite for 2016's "Puffer Week," held Jan. 24-30. The statewide educational and enforcement week aims to inform the public about the risks, dangers and most recently, heightened crime associated with auto theft, specifically "puffer cars" – vehicles left running unattended with the telltale puff of the exhaust. Auto theft is often the first step in committing other, more serious crimes. Recent headlines tell a harrowing tale for Colorado:

- "Gunshots fired after puffer car confrontation" (Denver Post)
- "Denver 'puffer' has both cars stolen in a single day after leaving them unattended" (7 News)
- "Car theft suspect recaptured after fighting his way out of Colorado Springs police vehicle" (Colorado Springs Gazette)

"Leaving your car running unattended is not only dangerous, it's illegal," says Colonel Scott Hernandez, Chief of the Colorado State Patrol. "That's why law enforcement and our community safety partners are joining forces this week to send an important message to Colorado drivers. Once a puffer car is stolen, the thief rarely stops there. We've seen both a rise in auto theft and the serious, violent crimes associated with it."

Results from a new statewide CAAT poll being released in conjunction with Colorado's Puffer Week show a growing percentage of Coloradans are getting the message and say they "NEVER" leave their cars puffing—66% compared to 60% in 2011 and 65% in 2014. However, 34% of Colorado drivers admit they have left their car running unattended. As to whether Coloradans are aware that it is illegal (C.R.S. 42-4-1206), 28% said they didn't know and another 8% responded that it is not illegal to leave your car puffing. (Source: Talmey-Drake Research & Strategy, Inc.) Seventy percent of respondents consider auto theft a problem or a major problem. Full survey results at www.LockDownYourCar.org

"Most drivers still have an 'It will never happen to me mentality', despite survey results that show 48% of Coloradans know someone who has had their car stolen," says Carole Walker, Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Association and CAAT chair. "It's this disconnect, and the escalation in the severity of auto theft-related crimes that drive our education efforts."

During Puffer Week law enforcement increases warnings and citations to those caught leaving their cars running unattended. Educational efforts include community distribution of CAAT informational flyers and LockdownYourCar.org ice scrapers, along with partners leveraging social media using #puffercars and driving citizens to the Lockdown [website](http://www.LockDownYourCar.org), where they can access auto theft prevention materials and tips (see list of planned activities below). www.LockDownYourCar.org features a hot spot map with a geo-locator tool, allowing users to search auto theft in their area – incentivizing the public to be auto theft aware.

“To successfully combat auto theft, we need the public to work hand-in-hand with law enforcement,” says Detective Greg Malsam, of the Longmont Police Department and President of CATI. “The long-standing partnership between Colorado Auto Theft Investigators and CAAT drives this collaboration, combining strategic law enforcement efforts with community-driven awareness by mobilizing the public to do their part in auto theft prevention.”

Both CATI and CAAT are funded by the Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority (CATPA) a statutory grant program that supports law enforcement, prevention and training programs through the collection of \$1.00 for every insured vehicle.

Snapshot of “Puffer Week” Activities:

CATPA Metropolitan Auto Theft Team (CMATT)

Educational materials will be available to citizens. CMATT will also be conducting puffer enforcement, by means of warnings and citing violations, throughout the area.

Englewood Police Department

The Englewood Police Department will be conducting an educational activity every day of Puffer Week at various locations, including coffee shops, grocery stores and other public sites. The Englewood Police Department will also be conducting puffer enforcement throughout the area.

Aurora Police Department

The Aurora Police Department will be conducting an educational and enforcement operation on Tuesday, January 26. Aurora Police Department will also be running a social media campaign, including a “Tweet along” to encourage engagement during the week.

Beat Auto Theft Through Law Enforcement (BATTLE)

Educational materials will be available to citizens. BATTLE patrol officers will be on the lookout for puffer cars and will speak to individuals about the consequences of leaving their car running unattended.

Pueblo Police Department

Educational materials will be available to citizens. Volunteers will be on the lookout for puffer cars and will speak to individuals about the consequences of leaving their car running unattended.

Jefferson County Police Department

Educational materials will be available to citizens. Jefferson County Police Department will also be running a social campaign to remind the public to never leave their cars running unattended.

Lakewood Police Department

Educational materials will be available to citizens. Volunteers will be on the lookout for puffer cars and will speak to individuals about the consequences of leaving their car running unattended.

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 Holly Franklin on behalf of Coloradans Against Auto Theft at 303-832-2700 ext. 221.

CAAT's winter public awareness campaign features high-profile TV spots, digital radio, pre-roll, social media and earned media to drive home that message that it is never a good time to have your car stolen – whether it's before the [big dog show](#) or [your first prom](#).

CAAT Coalition Partners

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.

- CATPA Metropolitan Auto Theft Team (CMATT)
- Beat Auto Theft Through Law Enforcement (BATTLE)
- Colorado Attorney General's Auto Theft Prosecution Initiative
- Colorado Auto Theft Investigators (CATI)
- Colorado Auto Theft Intelligence Coordination Center (ATICC)

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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