

Standardizing the Collection, Analysis and Dissemination of Motor Vehicle Theft Intelligence

By

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WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

- You have a motor vehicle theft suspect in custody on the side of the highway. He was driving a stolen Escalade. As you search his pockets you find a key to a late model Jaguar. You know your suspect probably stole the Jaguar as well and that the key belongs to one. Your community hasn't had any stolen Jaguars, so where did it happen and when. How will you find out?
- Your agency command staff just read an article in the newspaper about a rash of motor vehicle theft in your community. This commander wasn't aware that motor vehicle theft was even an issue in your community. The commander would like to know when this increase started and how you compare to other communities, the same size, in your state. The commander would like to have this information for the media interview this afternoon. Where will you get this data?
- A patrol officer called and recovered an unoccupied stolen vehicle. The inside of the car smells like household bleach. Are other communities discovering bleached vehicles? Does a certain criminal organization use bleach in a manner like this?

BACKGROUND:

The year was 2002, and the theft of motor vehicles was attracting more and more attention as a problem for the people of Colorado. Nationally, motor vehicle theft peaked in 1991, however in Colorado, motor vehicle theft continued to increase at an alarming rate each year. Cash strapped law enforcement agencies were tempted to lump motor vehicle theft investigations in with property crimes despite the relationship with the more serious NIBRS Group A crimes. One analysis by the Colorado Department of Justice found that 75% of the stolen vehicles were used to commit or facilitate another more serious felony. These included murder, rape, robbery, kidnapping, and assault. An increasing number of motor vehicle theft suspects were involved in deadly force encounters with law enforcement. One suspect was located in a different state and was involved in a 33 hour standoff with SWAT teams before he could be taken into custody. Stolen vehicles were also involved in police pursuits. A number of famous criminals got their start in crime stealing vehicles including; Bonnie and Clyde, Al Capone and others.

SOLUTION:

The Colorado Auto Theft Investigators Association (CATI) proposed and received support from the Colorado General Assembly, insurance companies and other law enforcement agencies across Colorado to create the Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority (CATPA). CATPA was created in 2003 and funded voluntarily by insurance companies to help fund motor vehicle theft investigations. In 2008, the Colorado General Assembly mandated funding from the insurance companies with permanent funding of \$1 per insured vehicle.

CATPA created a grant program to fight motor vehicle theft. Recipients of this Grant program include two teams of full time motor vehicle theft investigators which work the Denver metropolitan area and include a crime analyst for each team. The grant also covers four geographically spaced teams around the state and provides overtime funds for motor vehicle theft investigations and operations. The teams may purchase bait cars and technology to assist in investigations and operation. The grant also funds; trainings for motor vehicle theft investigators, a public awareness campaign for the citizens (Coloradans Against Auto Theft) and an Attorney General task force for prosecution support. These task forces have produced an amazing decline in motor vehicle theft beating the national average decline over the same time period.

CHALLENGES:

Motor vehicle theft investigators in Colorado face a number of challenges. In many situations, the time it takes for a driver to discover their car is missing, it could already have been moved to a different jurisdiction. No statewide, centralized crime database exists in Colorado. Each of the 323 law enforcement agencies in Colorado, have a proprietary records management system (RMS). In a small number of instances, the agency only collects paper copies of reports which are not databased. Each agency has a different motor vehicle theft report or a generic incident report which collects different data. When an officer from one agency recovers a vehicle it can take a long time to obtain the initial hard copy, report of the auto theft from the reporting agency. In a single crime series, involving 12 vehicles, an investigative request could take more than thirty days for all of the reporting agencies to locate and transmit the offense reports to the detective or analyst. Each agency collects different data that is not standardized. These challenges reduce the efficiency of investigators and analysts.

CENTRALIZATION:

To solve these challenges and assist investigators, CATPA sought a grant proposal to centralize the crime data collection and analysis. This led to the creation of the Auto Theft Intelligence Coordination Center (ATICC). The Colorado State Patrol provided one Sergeant and one Master Trooper to the program. CATPA then funded two crime analysts for the center. The ATICC sought to become the central repository for all motor vehicle theft data. The ATICC staff met with stakeholders including the insurance industry, auto theft investigators, patrol officers, crime analysts and information technology vendors. The ATICC sought the advice of Sheriff Offices and municipal agencies. They surveyed a mix of small, medium and large departments. The common platform in use was the Colorado Crime Information Computer (CCIC) System and the National Crime Information Computer System (NCIC), to enter vehicles as stolen or located. Working with the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI), ATICC developed a

proposal to use the CCIC interface as an intelligence collection and dissemination point. A method was created to capture data from police dispatchers and record clerks who initially entered stolen vehicles or recoveries. The same group of stakeholders was asked what data should be collected at the initial report and when the vehicle was located. Hundreds of ideas were submitted and an electronic survey tool was used to prioritize the data from most important to least important.

The CCIC Board of Executive Directors ultimately approved the proposal and technology was implemented to allow data to be submitted through the existing interface into CCIC. The set of data, called a mask, was stored on a new enterprise server. The original, basic, data set continued into NCIC followed by National Insurance Crime Bureau NICB. Later, additional technology was implemented to allow the entire data set to be transmitted directly from departmental RMS systems into the enterprise server.

For agencies that don't use on RMS the ATICC developed a Microsoft InfoPath form that could be completed remotely from a substation or a patrol officers in-car computer. Once the form is submitted, it can be transmitted by email to the ATICC server and the local agency supervisor or records clerk.

To enter a motor vehicle as stolen or located, the person entering the data must have a higher level of CCIC privileges than that of a typical sworn officer. However, to access the ATICC server, any level of CCIC privileges will allow access to the form through the CCIC/ NCIC interface. An officer on the western border of Colorado can take a motor vehicle theft report, and complete the entire data set. If that vehicle is driven across the state to the eastern edge of Colorado and stopped by law enforcement, the officer can instantly read the entire theft report submitted by the original officer. When the locating officer completes the recovery portion of the report, the original officer can see it immediately and complete his investigation. Later, the prosecutor can read both reports on the same screen using their CCIC/NCIC interface.

SURPRISES:

The initial analysis of data found a few surprises. A critical problem involved a delay in motor vehicle theft reports being entered into CCIC/NCIC. The average delay statewide was 4 ½ days. In some cases, delays of 30-60 days existed before the initial entry into CCIC/NCIC was completed. In essence, a car thief could potentially be contacted by Law Enforcement multiple times with no indication that the vehicle was stolen.

The Chief of the Colorado State Patrol coordinated with the Colorado Sheriffs and Chiefs to reduce the delay. Currently, the average delay statewide, is only a few hours or less. Another concern involved re-entry of purged vehicles. If a vehicle is initially entered stolen on October 1st, 2012, the NCIC system is designed to automatically purge the record on December 31st, 2017. Some law enforcement agencies re-enter the stolen vehicle to keep it active in the system. The procedure for re-entering a stolen vehicle was not consistently followed and resulted in the creation of a whole new stolen vehicle report. This caused the agency to have unusually high numbers of vehicle thefts reported based on duplication of the older purged thefts. An educational product was developed and distributed to assist agencies in the appropriate procedure for the re-entry of stolen vehicles after the five year purge.

PRODUCTS:

The ATICC developed a number of products for stakeholders. Stakeholders can access a link online that requires agreement to a nondisclosure policy and verification that they are a law enforcement employee or employee of another organization. Most products are “Law Enforcement Sensitive” and can only be distributed to employees of a law enforcement agency. The products include:

- Daily and weekly hotsheets. The hotsheet is an excel file with a Colorado map. An officer can view the entire state or a specific geographic area. The spreadsheet can also be automatically sorted by vehicle specific information or geographic specific information. One tab is custom designed to fit the largest department’s requirements.
- Analytical Reports for motor vehicle thefts. These reports are available quarterly and annually and contain analytical conclusions about the motor vehicle theft data. The target audience for these reports are law enforcement command staffs to help provide information for deploying resources.
- Information Bulletins are available to a law enforcement, civilian and members of the media. These reports contain information on motor vehicle theft and how to protect the consumer.
- Intelligence Bulletins are for law enforcement only. These contain law enforcement intelligence regarding motor vehicle theft. It is intended to be deployed quickly if a new crime pattern is detected or a new method is discovered.
- Parole Work Ups are available to law enforcement officers in Colorado only. The Colorado Department of Correction’s parole information is updated monthly and includes all convicts released on parole in Colorado that have motor vehicle theft in their criminal history. The ATICC can produce mapping products with the locations of motor vehicle thefts or recoveries compared with a parolee’s residence.
- Be On The Lookout (BOLO) for a person or vehicle associated with a crime. BOLOs are restricted to law enforcement and usually contain important officer safety information.
- Requests for Information (RFI) are used request feedback from all other agencies if they are experiencing certain types of incidents, trends or patterns. These are especially useful in working a crime series.

SERVICES:

The ATICC also provides research services for law enforcement investigator requests. The ATICC responded to 355 requests in 2012. A simple request might be an investigator in the field with a suspect in custody. The investigator found the key for a relatively uncommon make of vehicle in the suspect’s pocket. The investigator needs to know if any of that make of vehicle was recently stolen in a certain geographic area. An advanced request could involve up to 160 hours of analytical work to create link analysis and exhibits for the prosecution of an organized crime case.

One significant and time consuming task for the crime analyst is the “cleaning” of data. Spelling errors or the use of non standardized abbreviations can hamper an analysts ability to arrive at the correct conclusion. For example, if you tried to count stolen Hondas, would you count a record with the make of

HON? What about HOND? Or only HONDA? The database has tens of thousands of records to check. To reduce the cleaning time, the data mask (electronic form) uses drop down menus. This speeds the data entry and reduces the likelihood of spelling errors. As part of the initial entry, CCIC/NCIC performs a vehicle identification number (VIN) check. When the data reaches the ATICC database, the file is processed online by a service provider to fully decode the VIN. This provider can populate 55 data variables for each vehicle. This can identify a 4 wheel drive versus a 2-wheel drive vehicle. Other variables may include the presence of air bags, anti lock brakes, 2-doors or 4-doors. The variables can even identify if a vehicle is a four door, 4x4, diesel, "King Ranch" trim level, crew cab, long bed, dual rear wheel Ford pickup truck. This can be useful to spot a trend when a gang targets a specific vehicle like sport utility vehicles with a luxury trim level. By cleaning and adding value to the data at a central location, all crime analysts can benefit by not spending time cleaning their local data.

USES FOR INTELLIGENCE:

The ATICC is co-located with the Colorado Information Analysis Center (CIAC) and the Colorado State Patrol Intelligence unit. This partnership fosters cooperation and criminal intelligence sharing. In the past year, the ATICC has been able to deploy analysts to incident command posts and assist major criminal investigations. The ATICC attends monthly intelligence sharing meetings for motor vehicle theft and robbery investigators. Intelligence gathered by officers on patrol or investigators can be shared with analysts to accomplish a number of objectives. These objectives may include:

- Identification of patterns and trends
- Linking related crimes
- Development of leads
- Identification of potential targets
- Provide assistance to investigators in solving crimes
- Aid prosecution
- Provide analytical reports to command staff who make resource allocation decisions
- Assist in developing tactical and strategic counter-measures

The ATICC continues to refine processes to provide more relevant and timely intelligence to patrol officers and investigators. It remains important for ATICC analysts to work closely with investigators to identify useful techniques and processes. As techniques are identified they will be rolled out into field trainings around the state. By standardizing the collection of motor vehicle theft data on a statewide basis we can provide a service to law enforcement agencies by transforming this data into intelligence. By acting on strategic and tactical intelligence, the crime of motor vehicle theft can be reduced.

RELATED WEBLINKS:

- To sign up for ATICC Intelligence Products please email: cdps underscore attic at state dot co dot us
- Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority: <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/StatePatrol-Main/CBON/1251593176099>
- Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Association: <http://www.rmiiia.org/index.asp>
- Colorado Auto Theft Investigators Association: <http://www.coloradoautotheft.org/>
- Colorado State Patrol: <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/StatePatrol-Main/CBON/1251592908196>
- Colorado Bureau of Investigation: <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDPS-CBIMain/CBON/1251621089773>
- Colorado Department of Corrections: <http://www.doc.state.co.us/>

You will see two text boxes they would liked added where you have space and if possible the attached graphics as well.

Text box One:**COLORADO SNAP SHOT:**

Population: 5,111,796 (US Census 2011)

Number of Law Enforcement Agencies: 323 (Colorado Attorney General POST 2012)

Number of Sworn Officers: 13,520 (Colorado Attorney General POST 2012)

Motor vehicle theft in Colorado: 10,579 (Colorado Bureau of Investigation NIBRS 2011)

Text box Two:**DATA ANALYSIS WAS SUBJECT TO CHALLENGES:**

- Errors in entry

- Not following statewide policies
- Conflicting department policies
- Re entry of vehicles after purge
- Delay in entering a stolen vehicle

Editor's Note: Thanks to IAATI ATPA Committee Chairs Denise Cassano and Reg Phillips for sending this in.