

Auto Theft in the United States has become a sophisticated business and is one of the "staple enterprises" of many organized crime groups throughout the world. The El Paso County Auto Theft Prevention Task Force had been developed and implemented to address the problem with Tactical Strategies as a plainclothes anti-crime street operation and reported numerous successful operations. However, at the same time the auto theft rate and recovery rates by which the unit is gauged overall tended to reflect minimal variances. Under a new chain of command, the new staff officers met on several occasions and looked at restructuring the unit. At the same time the department was experiencing organizational flattening which the Task Force took advantage of. It was decided to decentralize follow-up investigations to the Regional Command Detective staff and re-assign the Auto Theft Task Force to the Directed Investigations Division, which is a more pro-active approach.

Early research by the Police Department staff and other law enforcement agencies exposed some interesting trends in the auto theft problem, and included:

- 1. Of the reported thefts throughout any given year approximately 38% were not true thefts and this had had an affect on deployment practices;
- 2. Of the actual thefts the purpose for theft was identified to include:
 - A. 54-62% were for Commercial Profit
 - B. 13-15% were for Transportation usage's
 - C. 8-12% were for Joyriding
 - D. 1-2% were for the purpose of committing other crimes
- 3. 46-48% of the stolen vehicles were recovered.

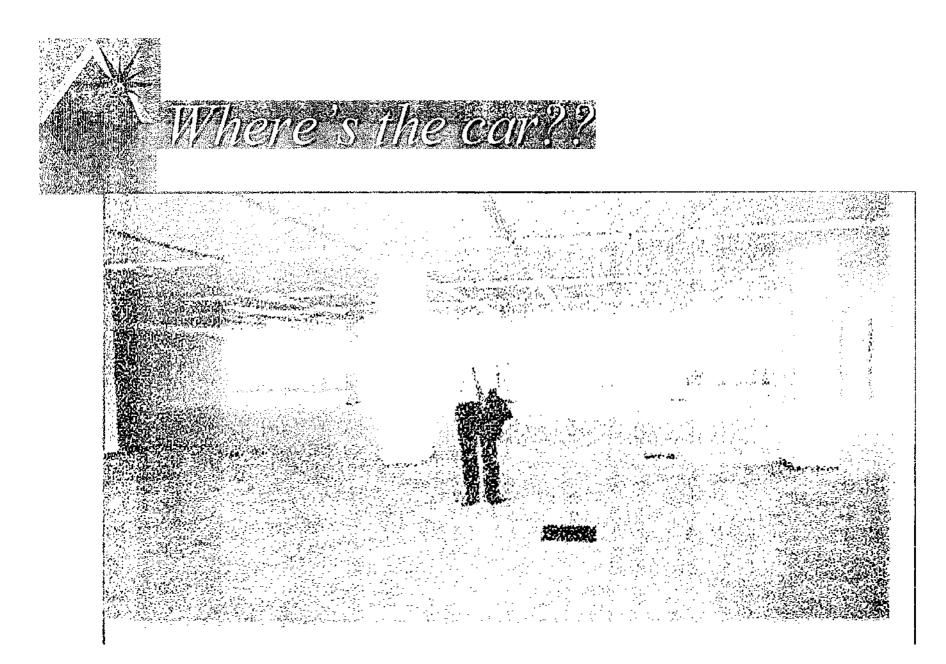
- A. 39-47% of the recoveries were made in Mexico
- B. 38-52% of the recoveries were within jurisdictional boundaries
- C. 3-9% of the recoveries were made in other national jurisdictions
- 4. There were 519-587 arrests made
 - A. 75% of the arrests were for outstanding warrants during inbound/outbound port of entry operations
 - B. 14% were on view arrests by patrol divisions
 - C. 11% were for conspiracy cases and organized crime

These trends were analyzed further by the law enforcement entities and the inclusion of civil and regulatory agencies, community leaders and private business. There were a series of surveys, tele-communication, and media announcements. This resulted in the identification of several alternatives until one was selected.

The response selected and implement required the restructuring of the Auto Theft Task Force and inclusion of other partners. Based on the trends revealed it was decided to incorporate a strategic investigation model and merge it with the anti-crime concept. All domestic and international initiatives were designed to address the repeat offender, organized criminal activity and traffickers of stolen property identified to be responsible for 62-64% of the theft problem.. The purpose was the subsequent use of criminal, civil and regulatory laws in order to disrupt and dismantle "organizations" responsible for the auto theft issues in the county. Simultaneously, crime prevention was used to educate the patrol division to maintain and/or increase patrol on-view operations. A cyclical approach insured there was consistent and continuous deployment data available to keep the program working.

In assessing the program, it has been determined that it has accomplished the task set for it. There have been consistent declines in the auto theft rate since inception and recoveries continue to increase.

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SCANNING

The recent auto theft rankings found in the Uniform Crime Report and the NICB report shows El Paso at number 15 out of 296 selected cities. In the state of Texas, El Paso has higher losses than Austin and San Antonio. In addition, the Uniform Crime Report and localized crime analysis show a comparable decrease in arrests and recoveries, demonstrating a fluctuation rather than an actual decrease in auto thefts. From January 1999 to January 2000 the annual report reflected total thefts at 1700 with a 42% recovery rate. 54% of the thefts were for commercial profit, 15% were for transportation, 12% for joyriding, 2% for the commission of another crime, and 17% could not be determined. With the impact of four major roundups concentrating on organized crime, the lull created by the reorganization period within entrenched organized crime entities, continues to exist and demands to be taken advantage of.

The prevalence of auto theft problems in the city and county of El Paso is unlike other cities and counties in the state of Texas. The demographics, target population, and geographic area compound issues of crime in El Paso County. In addition, the metroplex composition of the El Paso/Juarez area provides the stage for major symbiotic crime entities. Applying the funnel affect, the border region provides the pipeline between the

identified crime site and an extensive distribution network that has found locally stolen vehicles recovered in Canada, Guatamala, El Salvador, Honduras, as well as Mexico and other parts of the United States. Thefts with felonious intent have increased as evidenced by increased seizures of narcotics moving north and currency moving south according to U.S. Custom's reports.

Demographics and Target Population

The latest census indicates that the population of El Paso is approximately 606,526. The population of El Paso County including the various communities within is 86,651. The numbers introduced into El Paso from Fort Bliss and other associated military facilities is 35,000. The estimated population of Cd. Juarez is near 14 million. The total El Paso/Juarez metroplex is estimated to be 2,128,177 and is the largest international crossing in the United States.

There is an estimated registration of 400,250 vehicles in the city and county of El Paso annually, and the theft of nearly 3000 vehicles in 1998 is still significant. There has also been a major increase in recoveries from locations outside of El Paso County.

The isolation of the city, with respect to other major metropolitans such as Albuquerque, New Mexico, Phoenix, Arizona, and San Antonio, Texas, creates an atmosphere demanding residence in or near the city limits. This density in turn creates the opportunities for the emergence, growth, and continued existence of major organized criminal organizations.

Geographic Location:

El Paso County encompasses 1,058 square miles. Sixty miles of the southern edge shares the mternationai border with Mexico dominated by the Mexican City of Cd. Juarez of the

state of Chihuahua. This site houses the international pipeline between crime site and a distribution network.

The county of El Paso is dominated by the city of El Paso, but also includes many smaller communities that include Anthony, Canutillo, Soccoro, Clint, Fabens, San Elizario, Tornillo, Horizon City, Montana Vista, Hueco Estates and Alcala. Each identified community possesses an inordinate number of salvage yards and chop shop operations.

The northern and western edge of the county abuts New Mexico and its two adjacent counties of Otero and Dona Ana. Many of the New Mexico communities within close proximity to El Paso and include Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Mesilla, Roswell, Union, La Mesa, Vinton, Bernallio, etc. that house identified chop shop operations and salvage operations.

The east side of the county abuts Hudspeth County and located within close proximity are the communities of Fort Hancock, McNary, Esperanza, Sierra Blanca and Van Horn. World famous for its smuggling operations, a number of stolen vehicles constituting theft for felonious intent end up here.

International ports of entry and crossings between the United States and Mexico, that impact both the city and the county of El Paso include the Fort Hancock crossing, the Fabens port of entry, the Ysleta port of entry, the Bridge of Americas, the Stanton Street bridge, the Paso Del Norte bridge and the Santa Teresa port of entry. This represents the LARGEST INTERNATIONAL METROPLEX IN THE UNITED STATES and according to the U.S. Customs Service represents the highest number of pedestrian and automobile traffic in the country. Large Truck traffic is only second to Laredo, Texas.

Increased Organized Criminal Activity;

Recent activities and events have demonstrated a direct correlation between auto thefts, narcotics, and other smuggling operations in the El Paso county area. Referred to as the "<u>TL? OF THE ICEBERG</u>", auto thefts have developed into a significant indicator of major crime activity.

What began as predatory and parasitic crimes, has achieved symbiotic proportions, to service a pipeline and major distribution network.

Conspiracy cases have increased that associate auto thieves with business entities, import/export operations, and criminal street/prison gangs.

Clearly, criminal "COMBINATIONS", who collaborate in carrying on criminal activities, whether participants know each others' identities, or stand in arm's length relationships, has become more prominent within the city and county of El Paso.

This activity involves thefts for FELONIOUS INTENT, and contributes greatly to the consistent theft of autos.

The increased organized criminal activity has introduced more violence to the criminal acts involved, and there was an international epidemic of stolen autos used to transport homicide victims that resulted in the label of "Rolling Coffins" being applied to these cases.

Analyzing

1939: The city and county of El Paso in noted a dramatic increase in the number of auto thefts occurring within the area, and in addition, noted the dismal rate of recoveries.

1990: During the planning and preparation stages to address the problem 5636 autos were stolen reflecting a 4.5% increase. It was noted that nationally El Paso was

recognized as the number TWO spot for the most auto thefts, per capita, second only to a small town in Rhode Island. The significant difference was that Rhode Island suffered "joyriding" crimes with most vehicles recovered, whereas El Paso suffered permanent losses, with no means to impact recoveries.

1990, 1991, and 1992, the El Paso Police Department dedicated a small internal task force, with limited resources, to address the auto theft problem. This was recognized as a learning phase, and the lack of education, the extremely small size of the task force, combined to find only minimal success in minor reductions in hot spots, not affecting the overall rate.

In the latter part of 1993: the first El Paso County Auto Theft Prevention Task Force, under the direct leadership of the El Paso Police Department, received a start up grant from the Texas Auto Theft Prevention Authority. The results were immediate with a 2.1% decrease in auto thefts, which was considered successful. The startup grant funded a multi-agency task force, which included the Police Department and the Sheriff's Office. 1994: the newly created El Paso County Auto Theft Prevention Task Force became fully staffed and operational with phenomenal results with auto thefts decreasing 29.6%.

1995: saw an additional 0.6% decrease, which was still significant from the figures reported in 1989, 1990, and 1991. The statistical data also supported the fact that continued operations could maintain a decrease in auto thefts, but also a need for staff intensive operations.

1996: unfortunately showed an increase of 11% and it was at this time that organized criminal activity emerged as a significant challenge to the Auto Theft Prevention Task Force. Stolen autos and auto parts were shipped into Mexico, Central America and South

America. There was also a corresponding surge in criminal street gang activity shipping autos and auto parts north and east into the United States.

1997: witnessed the results of implementing strategic and tactical operations that attacked the auto theft problem from a myriad of fronts that included prevention, intervention, and apprehension. This resulted in a dramatic decrease in auto thefts of 45%. This was a dramatic demonstration of the abilities and capabilities of the El Paso County Auto Theft Prevention Task Force.

1993: experienced decentralization and restructuring to create a proactive unit assigned to the Directed Investigations Division. The unit was sub-divided into three teams utilizing established task force models that created two field teams which were activity response oriented and performed enforcement functions, and a third team with an investigative orientation that placed emphasis on criminal organizations and specific criminals. This all resulted in a decrease from the previous year, of another 22%. In recognition for this achievement the Auto Theft Prevention Task Force was recognized as the Unit of the Year which is a coveted Law Enforcement Award.

1999: resulted in a 22% decrease. Thefts totaled 1700 and the recovery rate improved to 46%. There was in increase in insurance fraud and false report cases. There were 203 auto theft related arrests made with 92 of them being for organized criminal activity.

2CC0: resulted in 4% increase. Thefts totaled 1771 and the recovery rate improved to 48%. There were 587 arrests. 443, 75% were arrested for outstanding warrants during port interdiction inbound/outbound operations. 25% were specifically auto theft related through engaging in organized criminal activity.

Analysis Conclusion:

The final definition of the problem adopted by the Auto Theft Task Force was that Organized Criminal Activity for the purpose of commercial profit was responsible for approximately 62% of the total thefts within the target area. This accounted for Repeat Offenders and clearly identified disposition and distribution locations.

Alternatives

The El Paso County Auto Theft Prevention Task Force, comprised of the El Paso Police Department and the El Paso Sheriffs Office, utilizes a combination of the two task force models, in controlling, reducing, and stabilizing auto thefts and related crimes in the city and county of El Paso. Key priorities for domestic law enforcement projects, facilitated by the Task Force, are the disruption and dismantling of auto theft organizations, including seizure of assets, and the investigation, arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment of auto thieves and stolen auto traffickers. The Task Force initiatives will emphasize attacking auto theft organizations at every level through a careful coordination of federal, state, and local criminal and civil enforcement efforts.

An international strategy that will emphasize the United States' pursuit of cooperative efforts with other nations, and will confront the problems of supply and demand, and the trafficking in stolen cars, as well as related crimes. Initiatives will attack salvage and storage facilities, interdict vehicle shipments and delivery in both source and transit countries, and disrupt and dismantle auto theft organizations through international criminal, civil, and regulatory enforcement.

To satisfy the project area needs and increase community participation, the Task Force will provide for and facilitate information dissemination paths, provide training and instruction, and make available engineering and equipment purchasing expertise to educate the public to establish working partnerships and to address the causes of auto theft crimes.

Response

MajorFunctions and Proposed Activities

The El Paso County Auto Theft Prevention Task Force will pursue auto theft projects dealing with PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, and INTERCEPTION initiatives and will formalize the objectives that include the disruption and dismantling of criminal organizations with a special interest in auto thefts. The task force will facilitate the pooling of expertise and other resources to address the entire spectrum of auto theft activity that includes syndicated crime organizations, unaffiliated small workgroups referred to as Frontera rings, and criminal street gangs.

Prevention

The El Paso County Auto Theft Prevention Task Force will continue its efforts in the H.E.A.T. program, the Protect Our Parts (POP), and training and instruction. The latter is to increase community involvement. The task force will also incorporate the following into their prevention strategies:

C.H.O.P. Shop: "Citizens Helping Other People" advertises the importance of the auto theft issues under the banner, <u>"You Can Come To Our Chop Shop. Or Your Car Can Go</u> <u>To Their Chop Shop*</u>. It also promotes the concept that auto thefts are the <u>"Tip Of The</u> <u>Iceberg"</u>, as a significant indicator of organized criminal activity associated with

narcotics trafficking, smuggling, financial crimes, and violence. Prevention officers will utilize the assistance of former victims obtained through volunteer programs, active solicitation, theft acknowledgement letters, quality control surveys, and victim surveys. Together, they will conduct three major crime prevention fairs at the three major malls to showcase accomplishments, reach out to educate and empower the public, explore new relationships, and develop sources of information.

Consortium of Lav/ Enforcement and Private Security: The Auto Theft Prevention Task Force regards private security as a private adjunct to the public criminal justice system. Through workshops and working partnerships, the task force will utilize the efforts of both entities to focus on auto theft issues. Law enforcement is designed to detect and apprehend (reactive) whereas private security is designed to prevent and protect (proactive). The dimensions of private security can complement the goals of the task force, especially in the area of personnel and resources.

Keeping Auto Theft Activity Out of Rental Property: The development and implementation of Landlord Training Programs will help the Auto Theft Prevention Task Force assist property owners, property managers, and residents keep illegal activity out of rental property. Apartment complexes and motel parking lots are significant problem sites for thefts and use as temporary storage facilities for thieves. The project will include a mechanism for pre-screening and eviction assistance.

Operation Paul Revere: Working with the print and electronic media, the Auto Theft Prevention Task Force will provide community alerts to trends and patterns to the community to reinforce the importance of auto theft crimes, promote education to the public, and improve community involvement. This will be accomplished with press

releases/conferences, documents, commentaries, testimonies, presentations, and a fax force, in a Bl-lingual manner.

Business Watch: Through media campaigns the community is being advised that as they shop around town, to be alert to suspicious activity, and report it to the nearest store employee they encounter because that employee has been trained by the Auto Theft Task Force in appropriate responses. Business participants will be trained in response techniques and this will improve the timeliness of reporting suspicious activity. It is a pre-planned activity designed for rapid response.

Intervention

Functionally, the task force will include street level enforcement that is activity response oriented. It is designed to provide a sophisticated and specialized service through a strategy of flexible response.

Surveillance Activities: In covert and clandestine operations, the task force will conduct surveillance operations as a discovery tool, to collect evidence of illegal activity, to gather suspect information, to establish links between suspects and others, to locate residences and hidden sites, to corroborate informant information, and to locate wanted person(s). In addition, a surveillance team is available to support a strategically planned interdiction mission, and to conduct intelligence missions.

Salvage Operations: The task force will improve salvage inspections with the addition of salvage inventories. The information obtained from salvage inventories will be retained in a database as a discovery tool to detect salvage switch operations, and to deploy investigative personnel. Targeted investigations may be for various charges not necessarily associated with theft.

Bail Vehicle: The use of informant placement techniques will be the basis of deployment of the bait vehicle in clandestine operations, sting operations, and reversals to target the supply levels of the unaffiliated small workgroups and criminal street gangs.

Operation Border Heat: This will consist of a series of random bridge checks at the international ports of entry, with the U.S. Customs Service. These operations will include both inbound and outbound traffic because of the rising number of auto thefts for felonious intent. Cross training will be included to prepare participants in the recovery of stolen vehicles, and seizures of narcotics and currency. There is a significant link between auto theft and narcotics that will be impacted.

Import/Export: The task force and the U.S. Customs Service will conduct operations that target the port of entry import/export lots, and Import/Export brokerage houses in the enforcement of Customs laws and to garnish additional information for the salvage inventory database.

Operation Border Guard: The task force will establish communication protocols between the task force and Customs, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service to facilitate the rapid and accurate exchange of interdiction tactical information. The communications regime allows for response by an on-call rapid response team, in a timely fashion, to the consequences of operational events as they occur.

Interception

The organized crime team will have an investigative orientation with formal planning and strategies that emphasize on criminal organizations and specific criminals. Taking the task force to new levels, this emphasis will be staff intensive and time consuming, but a comprehensive approach must be adopted and includes the following tactics:

 $\hbar i$ Paso County Area Auto Thaft Information Merverk: The task force will amass auto theft related information from a variety of sources such as that generated by crime prevention initiatives, international cooperatives, suspect/associate debriefings, federal access, informant information, etc. and create analytical databases, and a vehicle for timely transmission to the appropriate recipient. Intelligence gathering and information sharing will allow for more action from other agencies.

Replacing the previous project of symbiotic intervention Big Rico, Little .Rico: strategies, the Auto Theft Prevention Task Force will implement a multi-agency investigative response-including one or more prosecution authorities-to target major conspiracies operating across multiple jurisdictions and establish a formal project mechanism whereby investigative and prosecutive resources can be allocated, focused, and managed on a shared basis against targeted offenses and offenders, that include the A.C.A.T.S (identified repeat offenders). Tactics will include electronic surveillance, assets forfeiture to secure illicit profits and proceeds, compelled witness testimony via grand jury subpoena, investigative grand juries through the Attorney General's Office, use of conspiracy and anti-trust laws, special perjury prosecutions, and networth investigations. Already instrumental in this endeavor is the working partnership the task force has with the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) which is the key enforcement and established money laundering unit to search, seize, arrest, and present cases to the Mexican Judiciary targeting Mexican Banks, casas de cambio, and smaller centros cambiarios.

Operation Hard-line: The task force will incorporate civil and regulatory authorities that include TX D.O.T., the Texas D.P.S. licensing section, the County Tax Assessor, and

health, occupational safety, and environmental agencies, into task force strategies to increase the use of civil remedies and recovery of criminal assets acquired with funds traceable to criminal activity. Instrumental to this project will be the use of revocation of business licenses, corporate charters, and other certifications possessed by criminal enterprises.

Operation Red Flag: Is an investigative effort targeting false reports and suspicious claim reports. The task force will re-design the initial police complaint report with respect to auto thefts to insure a more thorough preliminary investigation with inherent "red flags" prompting an investigative follow-up. Operationally, the task force will conduct investigations with NICB, OCRA, independent agents, non-member agencies, and the Bureau of Fraudulent Claims.

Impact of Project on Stated Problems

Law Enfcrcement/Detection/Apprsherision Projects: The El Paso County Auto Theft Prevention Task Force will impose an integrated and coordinated enforcement effort to target areas with the largest number of incidents and the least amount of control. Taking into account differing criminal thresholds, the task force will dismantle and eliminate illegal resources operating in the project area with targeted investigations on various charges not necessarily associated with auto theft.

Prosecution/Adjudication/Conviction Projects: The Auto Theft Prevention Task Force provides prosecutors with a sophisticated and specialized resource that can provide the prosecutable cases that satisfy prosecutorial discretion in case selection for trial. The task force also provides a pooling of expertise that provides prosecution efforts expert

witnesses, and continuing investigations as needed. This accounts for the high number of cases accepted for prosecution by the District Attorney's Office

Prevention/Anti-Theft Devices/And Automobile Registration Projects; The Auto Theft Prevention Task Force actively seeks outs and arranges for testing rights to experimental equipment, both past products and prototypes to satisfy the engineering and equipment purchase responsibilities adopted by the unit. All products are displayed to the public through crime prevention fairs with project C.H.O.P. Shop. Press releases are also prepared and submitted to the media via the Police Department's Public Information Office to identify and announce innovative products. With respect to registration projects, El Paso is number 4 in the state for H.E.A.T. registrations. The Crime prevention officer provides direct service to the community, and oversees and equips his counterparts at the five regional commands and the Sheriffs Office throughout the county in continuing promotion of registration projects.

Reduction of the Sale of Stolen Vehicles or Parts Projects: VIN etching will be offered by the crime prevention officer through C.H.O.P. Shop and upon request from vehicle owners. Property identification through markings that include ones' Texas Driver's License Number continues to be the responsibility of the crime prevention officer as a direct service and through coordination with the Fire Department. Future plans will call for issuance of computer discs to the public containing photos of their property, serial numbers, and identifiers to be available to law enforcement officers should the need arise. This concept is taken from the Child Find programs sponsored by KODAK.

Public Awareness and Crime Prevention/Education/InfbrrnationProject: The Auto Theft Task Force provides three major training programs entitled, "Tactical Planning,

Protection, and Surveillance". "Risk Assessments: Dealing with White Collar Crime", and newly incorporated, "Red Flags: Suspicious Claims Reports." They also sponsor an annual Auto Theft School: Basic and Advanced, conducted by D.P.S. Law enforcement training is open to member agencies, surrounding communities, and federal, state, and international groups. With respect to the community and the public, awareness and prevention programs are provided through CHOP Shop. Workshops are offered to private security to further consortium goals, and the landlord training programs are being developed and marke

Inter-agency Cooperatives and Coordination

The Auto Theft Prevention Task Force has benefited from previous networking and/or reestablishment of position within the community and surrounding regions.

Symbiotic Intervention Strategies was successful in formalizing investigative programs with federal services and civil and regulatory authorities. Some of the active cooperatives involved included U.S. Customs, Drug Enforcement Agency, TX D.O.T., D.P.S. Licensing, the Multi-County Drug Team, and the Mexican State Police and the Procuraduria General de la Republica. This in turn laid the groundwork for upcoming events and investigative endeavors.

The task force has organized in as expansive, functional, and flexible manner as any complex criminal organization. Rather than relying on occasional instances of agencies working together in expressions of good will, the Auto Theft Prevention Task Force, tlirough grant funded cooperatives and memorandum of understanding, now provides the formal framework for local to national multi-agency planning and coordination of case activities, both domestic and abroad.

Assessment

Quantifiable Data

Statistical data is maintained by the task force for the ATP A quarterly reports, and the Department's weekly activity report, weekly projected activity report, monthly report and annual report. Arrest ratios, recovery amounts, recoveries, and auto theft rates are included.

Every assignment is a numbered operation that requires a deployment request, special operations order, lesson learned observation report, post mission analysis, and an after action summary. Data will include target information, type-level of criminal activity, potential investigative impediments, proposed investigative actions, prosecution strategy, personnel and equipment commitments, and anticipated expenses.

The Horizontal Perspective of Case Management is used to keep track of investigative assignments and dispositions to produce quantifiable data.

Conclusion

Project Innovativeness

In its persistence for border solutions, the Auto Theft Prevention Task Force feels its projects and programs serve to facilitate the pooling of expertise and other resources so that the individual strengths of the member agencies become collective task force member strengths.

Intelligence gathering, information sharing, and communications among agencies are greatly enhanced in the more formal coordinated task force setting and on a much broader base than in a case by case setting.

Decentralization of responsibilities has allowed the task force to develop and evolve Into a proactive entity that is directed to auto theft crime issues rather than reacting to crime after the fact.

Through Community Policing efforts the task force has empowered the public to take and active role in crime suppression initiatives.

Dismantling and disruption operations have provided the arena to incorporate working partnerships with other law enforcement agencies and civil and regulatory agencies, domestic and abroad.

Training and cross-training programs has united efforts in Mexico, New Mexico, and other surrounding communities. This training now includes federal, state, and local concerns.

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