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OPERATION: CATCH A CAR THIEF

MVD announces new high-tech, high speed program to catch car thieves in New Mexico

Albuquerque – The state’s Motor Vehicle Division this week installed a high-tech, high-speed program, tied into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), to catch car thieves as they attempt to change the title for the stolen vehicles.

The MVD is also running through the national crime database all vehicles-over 560,000 each year, registered in New Mexico in the last five years to determine which of the vehicles may have been stolen. The results of this search will be reported to local law enforcement agencies for follow-up.

Ken Ortiz, director of MVD, said the new initiative, developed in cooperation with the state’s Department of Public Safety and local law enforcement agencies, will reduce auto theft in New Mexico.

“Auto theft is a big problem in New Mexico, and our efforts at MVD will help to catch criminals as they try to sell these stolen vehicles,” Ortiz said. “We are working very closely with law enforcement at the federal level, in other states, and throughout New Mexico.”

In 2006, Ortiz said, there were 9,225 vehicles reported as stolen in New Mexico. During 2007, Albuquerque ranked 7th in the nation on the amount of stolen vehicles with 819 stolen vehicles for every 100,000 people. “In addition to helping catch suspects and recover stolen motor vehicles, this system will be a great help to victims that may be unaware they have purchased a questionable vehicle,” stated Major Tim Baughman, NM State Police.

The MVD system installed in all 90 MVD offices statewide runs vehicle data through the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) to determine if a

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vehicle is listed as "stolen" before the vehicle is titled in New Mexico. The process takes about five seconds.

If a vehicle is identified as stolen, MVD software will block the title transfer from occurring, and MVD will immediately report the information to local law enforcement for further action.

Ortiz said that state law, since 1953, has required MVD to verify if a vehicle has been reported as stolen before it is titled in New Mexico. While MVD had been checking titles being transferred from out-of-state to in-state, the agency had never checked in-state title transfers.

In the 2008 legislative session, HM 53 directed MVD and the NM State Police to create a task force to study the auto theft problem in New Mexico. When Ortiz began to chair the Auto Theft Task Force, the other members informed the MVD director of the need to check in-state title transfers. Ortiz said that he began work on the project right away and that work led to today's announcement.

"We've gone, very quickly, from having a weak system to having one of the best, fastest, and high-tech in the country," Ortiz said. "We're looking forward to catching car thieves, and reducing the level of auto theft in New Mexico."

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