Maryland Patrolman Uses Component Part Label Knowledge to Capture Car Thief: Efforts Result in 3M/IAATI Vehicle Theft Investigation Award

A Prince George's County, Md., patrolman accepted the 3M/International Association of Auto Theft Investigators (IAATI) 15th Annual Vehicle Theft Investigation Award today for using his knowledge of component part labels to recover a stolen vehicle with counterfeit registration plates and altered vehicle identification numbers (VIN). The award is co-sponsored by 3M and IAATI and recognizes investigators for outstanding investigation efforts in which anti-theft VIN labels play a crucial role.

Corporal Edward Gesser stopped a vehicle bearing suspicious registration plates, which turned out to be made of paper with scanned images of legitimate metal registration plates. He was able to prove the vehicle was stolen by locating both altered and original component part labels.

"Every 27 seconds a vehicle is stolen in the United States," said Tracie Mortenson, marketing director, IAATI. "Component part labels with security features allow trained investigators like Corporal Gesser to battle against auto thieves and recover stolen vehicles." In fact, component part labels have proven so effective in auto theft investigations that auto manufacturers are required by U. S. law to attach them to all vehicles. "The law has been in effect since 1985," Mortenson continued. "It's extremely important that the U.S. government continues to enforce the label standard so that component part labels can be easily authenticated by trained investigators."

Gesser's extensive knowledge of component part anti-theft VIN labels stems from training he has both received and delivered. "The training classes teach us what to look for ... there were some terrible counterfeits involved in this situation," Gesser said. He added that it was clear the car was a newer model Mercury, but the VIN plate indicated it was a 1995 model.

When component part labels are removed, a special security feature leaves behind a visible "footprint." Gesser explained, "The security feature allowed me to see clearly where labels had been removed. I knew if I could find an original anti-theft VIN, I'd have what I needed to make the arrest."

Gesser found what he needed in two component part labels missed by the thief that displayed the vehicle's true VIN, which proved it was a 2001 Mercury Grand Marquis. During the follow-up investigation it was discovered the car was stolen from a car dealership after the thief presented a phony Washington, D.C., driver's permit to take a test drive, from which he did not return. The driver of the vehicle was charged with motor vehicle theft, theft over $500, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle and six counts of obliterating manufacturer's serial numbers.

Other evidence found during the impound inventory included a file folder with several counterfeit federal safety certification labels, photocopies of Maryland registration plates, numbers cut out that would allow the suspect to create any plate number he wished and a highlighted newspaper article describing anti-theft technology. Even with those tools, the thief did not have the benefit of training and did not fully understand why his fake plates and labels did not fool a trained investigator.

"As he was being placed in his cell, he said to me 'tell me, did you have some sort of electronic gadget to tell that thing wasn't real or are you that good?'" Gesser said.

Reports from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the National Institute of Justice say anti-

theft labels have been a significant contributor to the decline of auto theft in the United States since the early 1990s. The studies report component part anti-theft labels aid most auto theft investigators to arrest and prosecute car and parts thieves.

Component part labeling classes are offered by and conducted at most IAATI chapter, branch and international seminars. In addition, 3M offers label verification tools and training materials for localized investigator training. To find out more about upcoming classes, visit the IAATI Web site at www.iaati.org.

A leader in security products, 3M provides security-labeling systems to many of the world's largest automotive manufacturers. For more information, contact 3M Security Systems Division at 1-800-328-7098, ext. 5, or go to http://www.3m.com/security.

About 3M

3M is a $16 billion diversified technology company with leading positions in consumer and office; display and graphics; electronics and telecommunications; health care; industrial; safety, security and protection services; transportation and other businesses. Headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota, the company has operations in more than 60 countries and serves customers in nearly 200 countries. 3M is one of the 30 stocks that make up the Dow Jones Industrial Average and also is a component of the Standard & Poor's 500 Index. For more information about 3M, go to www.3M.com/profile/pressbox/index.jhtml.

3M, St. PaulDonna Fleming, 651-736-7646

---

https://news.3m.com/2003-08-04-Maryland-Patrolman-Uses-Component-Part-Label-Knowledge-to-Capture-Car-Thief-Efforts-Result-in-3M-IAATI-Vehicle-Theft-Investigation-Award