

Snowmobile theft result of alcohol

by **Geoff Kennedy**
for the **Tundra Times**

BETHEL — Snowmobile theft remains an ongoing problem in Bethel.

In the past five years, Bethel police have logged 186 thefts and recovered 100 of them. That's a recovery rate

Four out of five times people take the machine while under the influence of alcohol, Police Officer Jean Achee estimates.

"It's better than walking. It's cheaper than a cab and it doesn't take them very long to take a snowmachine," he said.

Village residents sometimes spend their return air fares on alcohol and depend on the nearest available snowmobile to get back home, said a snowmobile dealer in Bethel.

To a lesser extent, people take

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• Thefts total nearly \$200,000 per year

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snowmachines for joy-riding or strip them for parts, Achee said.

Police Chief Jack McDonald recommends people park their snowmachines in lighted areas, remove the ignition keys when they leave the machines, lock the machine onto something or secure the machine by locking steel cables through the snowmobile tracks.

McDonald estimates the thefts cost between \$175,000 and \$185,000 a year in loss of property.

Leaving snowmachines so readily available for drunks increases the danger to the general public and could leave negligent owners open to a lawsuit, he said.

"You certainly have a liability issue, if it can be demonstrated you didn't exercise due caution in trying to control this vehicle to prevent its theft."

Owners need to do more than just remove the ignition key when they leave their machines, said one Bethel snowmobile dealer. To help ensure their vehicles from theft, owners could

have a cutoff toggle switch installed to start it, he said.

Using a steel cable locking system and the cutoff toggle switch on the ignition system would cost the owner an additional \$50 to \$100, the dealer estimated.

Spending the relatively small amount of money to guard an investment of \$5,000 or more would be an excellent investment, Chief McDonald said. Snowmobile dealers would provide an important public service by installing such systems at no extra cost to snowmobile buyers, he said.