

Bethel reports higher snowmobile theft

by Geoff Kennedy
for the Tundra Times

BETHEL — Other rural Alaska communities apparently have less of a snowmobile theft problem than Bethel has.

Police officials in Nome, Kotzebue, Dillingham, and the North Slope Borough all report a higher recovery rate of stolen vehicles.

Rarely do people in these communities use stolen vehicles to transport themselves to other places, officials say.

In 1988, the last year for which statistics are available, the City of Kotzebue logged 113 thefts of motor vehicles of all kinds, said Police Chief Ed Ward. A little less than half of those vehicles were snowmachines, he estimated.

Most often, people take the snowmachines to go joy-riding. Rarely do they take the machines to villages in the area, but occasionally people strip snowmachines for parts, Ward said.

Kotzebue police recover about 75 percent of vehicles stolen in the community, Ward said.

No one has reported a snowmobile stolen so far this year, said Nome Police Chief Bob Kauer. Sometimes three and four wheeled all-terrain vehicles are taken, but are nearly always recovered, Kauer said.

"Our problem is more of joy-riding," said Dillingham Police Chief Ralph Taylor. Sometimes, people strip snowmachines for parts, he said.

"They may not be in the best condition, but we usually find them," Taylor said.

About 90 percent of the time, the Dillingham police recover the stolen vehicles in town, he estimated.

Thieves sometimes take outboard motors and skiffs in Dillingham, Taylor said.

Joy-riding accounts for most of the 230 motor vehicles thefts in the past three years in the North Slope Borough, said Scott Campbell, the deputy director of the Department of Public Safety.

A few vehicles are stolen and stripped for parts, he said. Police officials recover nearly 95 percent of the stolen vehicles, Campbell said.

Bethel, surrounded by 56 villages, many of them a short distance away, has recovered only 58 percent of the snowmobiles taken in the past five years.