

Catalytic Converter Thefts in Houston

Catalytic converters are being stolen at malls, shopping centers, company parking lots, and even in driveways – and replacements can cost \$1,400. Because converters are under the car, most people do not notice anything strange until they start the vehicle and hear the deafening roar of a cut off muffler. Catalytic converter thefts cost individuals and businesses all over Houston a fortune in replacements and repairs.



According to the Insurance Services Office (ISO), the number of catalytic converter thefts in 2008 was well over 3,000% higher than in 2007 - more thefts than in 2004 through 2007 combined.

What Is A Catalytic Converter?

Every vehicle made after 1975 has a catalytic converter. A catalytic converter is a component of your vehicle's exhaust system which chemically converts harmful exhaust gases into carbon dioxide and water vapor. Catalytic converters have been required on all cars produced since 1975 to meet strict emissions regulations. To learn more about catalytic converter laws and requirements, visit <http://www.catalyticconverter.org/law>.

Why They Are Stolen

Catalytic converters contain small amounts of three precious metals (the catalysts) - platinum, rhodium, and palladium – whose prices per ounce are currently about \$1,060, \$1,000, and \$210, respectively. Thieves sell catalytic converters to metal recyclers for as much as \$150 each depending on the type of catalytic converter and its condition. There are sites online listing the value of specific makes and models of catalytic converters. The recyclers then extract the precious metals from the catalytic converters and sell them on the metals market.

How They Are Stolen

Many catalytic converters can be removed in only a few minutes. They are usually removed in one of three ways – unbolted, cut off with a battery powered saw, or cut off with an acetylene torch. Some catalytic converter thieves work in organized groups while others are simply drug addicts taking advantage of a quick way to get cash.

All cars are at risk but AAA reports that SUV's are targeted most often because they are higher off the ground and thieves can easily crawl under them to remove the converter. According to Edmunds, late model Toyotas and some Nissans are the most popular among thieves. Unfortunately, recovering catalytic converters is nearly impossible since they are not marked with serial numbers or other identifiable characters tying them to an individual car.

Businesses Losing Fortunes

Businesses that maintain commercial fleets are often hit hard by catalytic converter thefts. Thieves are attracted to the all-you-can-take appeal of an unwatched fleet and at up to \$1,400 per replacement, having the converters stolen from an entire fleet of trucks or vans can be a significant blow to a company's bottom line. It is a very real threat for many businesses.

How to Prevent Theft

Sergeant Gene Linder of the Harris County Precinct 4 Constable office said of catalytic converter thefts, “Those things are stolen all the time. Do what you can to *deter* [thieves]. The best thing is to put your car in the garage and lock it and keep your car in visible places when you are out and about.”

There are a handful of preventative methods and devices for deterring catalytic converter theft including:

1. Spot welding - On some cars the converter can be spot welded to the car or its frame so it cannot be removed. This is not fool-proof against an acetylene torch.
2. Aftermarket Converters – Aftermarket converters (not factory original) contain less of the valuable precious metals thieves want and thieves often know this. Replacing a stolen catalytic converter with an aftermarket converter will normally prevent its re-theft while still cleanly meeting emissions regulations.

Tommy Ripley, of Ripley’s Muffler & Brakes, sees converter-less cars and trucks on a regular basis in his shops on 1960 and in The Woodlands and says, “We’ve had fleet clients whose converters were stolen a SECOND time after we replaced them with original equipment (OE) catalytic converters but most of our clients prefer the aftermarket converters anyway because we can install those for about half the price dealers charge.”

3. Devices – There are two main converter theft-deterrent devices which can be installed on most vehicles. Those are the Cat Cuff (<http://www.catcuff.com>), which sells for about \$70, and the Cat Clamp (<http://www.catclamp.com>), which sells for between \$270 and \$320. Ripley’s Muffler & Brakes can install the Cat Cuff and Cat Clamp but Tommy mentions, “Most people will not invest in preventative measures because they don’t believe it will happen to them.”
4. Weld the Bolts – Welding the bolts attaching the converter to the muffler prevents them from being loosened but the catalytic converter can still be cut off.

Some car companies are developing new catalytic converters that require smaller amounts of the precious metals. Using its new “single-nanocatalyst” technology, Mazda has reduced the amount of precious metals in the 2010 Mazda3’s converter by 70% greatly reducing its cost - and street value.

The incidence of catalytic converter thefts is directly related to the market prices of platinum, rhodium, and palladium. The prices are not currently at an all-time high but they are certainly high enough to be lucrative for thieves who know how to crawl under a car for a quick buck.

For Additional Information

Ripley’s Mufflers and Brakes

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Media-Friendly Photo

<http://www.leadoptimize.com/pr-images.htm>