



# Escalon Police Department

## Memorandum

**To: Press release**

**From: Acting Chief of Police, Milt Medeiros**

**Subject: What Vehicle Owners can do to prevent Catalytic Converter Thefts**

**Date: 08/20/2013**

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### Introduction:

The City of Escalon, like many of the other surrounding communities in the greater San Joaquin and Stanislaus County area, are continuing to experience thefts from motor vehicles which are target specific. These thefts involve the taking of Catalytic Converters.

This type of theft is both lucrative and can be easily undertaken. Thieves continue to focus on Toyota Motor products, specifically the Tacoma model pickup. Full size Dodge trucks have also been targeted along with other sport utility vehicles. Because of their ground clearance and engineering design, the aforementioned vehicles are a favorite of Catalytic Converter thieves.

### General Catalytic Converter Information:

A Catalytic Converter is a vehicle emission control device which converts toxic byproducts of combustion in the exhaust of an internal combustion engine to less toxic substances by way of catalyzed chemical reactions. Most present-day vehicles that run on gasoline are fitted with a three-way converter, so named because it converts the three main pollutants in automobile exhaust: carbon monoxide, unburned hydrocarbon and oxides of nitrogen. The first two of these substances undergo catalytic combustion and the last is reduced back to nitrogen.

Catalytic Converters are located beneath the body of a motor vehicle and are part of the exhaust system. They are generally bolted to an exhaust collector and are normally situated between the exhaust manifold and the muffler. Catalytic Converters, along with copper and other metals, have become a hot commodity for thieves. Catalytic Converter theft has become popular because of their value, relative ease to steal and their lack of identifying markings. The lack of identification makes it difficult to identify victims and successfully apprehend and prosecute criminals.

In most cases, thieves take the stolen Catalytic Converters to metal recyclers. The recyclers pay an average of \$50.00 per converter for the precious metals they contain. Certain converters, some of which are found in certain Dodge trucks, can pay anywhere from \$250.00 to \$400.00. Victim's pay an average

of \$1000.00 (or an average of \$250.00 / \$500.00 in insurance deductible) to get converter(s) replaced. It can cost as much as \$4000.00 in some cases.

#### Common Places Where Catalytic Thefts Occur:

##### 1. Your Home Driveway or Street:

Most of the Catalytic Converter thefts occur while your vehicle is parked in your driveway or on the street in front of your home.

##### 2. Auto Dealerships:

Motor vehicles stored on a dealership lots are sometimes targeted. The thieves have all night to steal popular Catalytic Converters while the new / pre-owned vehicles sit in their sales and parking lots unmonitored. Dealers have seen up to 20 Catalytic Converters taken in a night.

##### 3. Hardware / Convenient Store Parking Lots:

Vehicles parked in large open Hardware / Convenient Store parking lots are targeted as well. A look-out will often watch out as a thief takes the Catalytic Converter.

##### 4. Semi-Truck Auto Transport Trailer:

New motor vehicles are being targeted while they are on a Semi-Truck Auto Transport Trailers. Thieves can easily get beneath the vehicles to remove the Catalytic Converters.

#### Tools of the Catalytic Converter Thief:

Stealing a Catalytic Converter takes either a wrench (some battery powered) or a reciprocating saw. In some cases thieves have used mechanics dollies to slide under vehicles more easily.

#### How long can it take to steal a Catalytic Converter?

It takes approximately three minutes to either unbolt a Catalytic Converter or use the reciprocating saw to cut it from the exhaust system. Good thieves take less time.

#### How do Catalytic Converter Thieves Work?

The occasional or “opportunity” Catalytic Converter thieves conduct a random prowl of neighborhoods or business districts for specific targets. They look for soft targets or what are referred to as “easy steals.” SUVs are favorite targets. Toyota SUVs are preferred because their Catalytic Converters are secured in place by bolts only. On occasion they will follow cars and wait for them to park. These thieves are often the ones who strike non-business targets and go on theft sprees which will last several hours or sometimes days.

The more organized Catalytic Converter thieves look for larger scores. They attack car dealerships, parking lots of auto repair shops, auto fleet parking locations, airport long term parking areas and poorly attended / monitored parking lots. These thieves are better equipped, work faster and work in teams to maximize their efforts. These are crews more likely to steal from businesses and / or where there is a larger concentration of vehicles.

#### Nine Ways to Deter Catalytic Converter Theft:

1. Defensive Parking

If you have a fleet of vehicles block the high-clearance vehicles with lower clearance vehicles. The goal here is obstructing access beneath the target vehicle(s). At the very least you want to slow the thieves down as much as possible so that your security measures have time to effectively respond.

2. Effective Security Lighting

Lighting is vital in reducing Catalytic Converter theft. Though the opportunity thieves are getting bold enough to strike busy areas during day light hours, the more organized thieves are normally less brazen. They are more professional and a bit more risk averse. Good security lighting makes your vehicles visible to the street without creating glare.

3. Live Video Surveillance

For some businesses it will make sense to install video cameras and employ live surveillance specialists to monitor Catalytic Converter theft. If your live surveillance specialists are authorized to call the police on your behalf you can stop Catalytic Theft before it happens, potentially saving yourself the cost of damage to your vehicle.

4. Monitor Your Local News

The less organized opportunity thieves fall into quickly recognizable patterns in local areas. Monitor your local news using "Google alerts" (you can set up an account at little or no cost). Monitor terms such as "your city / region" Catalytic Converter. This will give you an idea of when there are Catalytic Converter thieves in your area.

5. Spread Community Awareness

If you hear about Catalytic Converter theft through Google alerts, or even suffer the theft of a Catalytic Converter from your vehicle, consider getting the word out in some way to others in your area. The opportunity Catalytic Converter thieves often strike locally and repeatedly during a crime spree. Call your friends and associates in the area, knock on the doors of your neighbors and post fliers. Even send them this article there may be something in it which can save them the cost of a repair.

6. Fencing Around Your Vehicles

Fencing will deter the occasional / opportunistic Catalytic Converter thief, and it will slow down the more organized thieves so that your other security measures such as video surveillance can respond.

7. Welding Bolts

If your Catalytic Converters are “bolt on” you can have the bolts welded shut. This is only a deterrent to the lowest grade of Catalytic Converter thief or the one who works with a wrench only.

8. Catalytic Converter Protective Sleeves

Protective coverings for your Catalytic Converter, such as the device known as the ‘Catclamp”, can deter thieves as well. The “Catclamp” and its competitor “Catcuff” makes it more difficult for a reciprocal saw wielding thief to steal your converter. They are somewhat pricey though, and if you’re operating a fleet of vehicles or an auto dealership it may not be cost effective.

9. ID # Etching

Etching your converter with a serial number or vehicle license plate number will help police track down your converter after it’s stolen. This will not protect you from theft, but it can provide the police with some direction in their efforts to identify and catch the thieves preying on your neighborhood vehicles.