



In Search of Catalytic Converters: The Latest Trend in Vehicle Thefts

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Catalytic converter thefts are on the rise again around the country, primarily due to the value of metals. Thieves target mostly newer, lightweight vehicles, such as the Toyota Prius, but are also destroying passenger vans and vehicles owned by businesses, in order to sell the metal at scrapyards.

Most people are familiar with the words ‘catalytic converter’ and understand that it’s part of a vehicle, but many are unfamiliar with exactly what it does. A catalytic converter is a metal canister connected to the vehicle’s exhaust system. The inside of the canister contains a matrix shaped like a honeycomb, coated with platinum, rhodium, and palladium. These are metals that convert pollutant gases like carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons, into carbon dioxide and water. According to the Wall Street Journal, “There are about two grams of harvestable palladium in a Toyota Prius’ converter . . .” (Hadari, 2019). However, the exact amount varies by vehicle.

While these precious metals can yield a good profit, a local scrap metal dealer in Hellertown states the value of catalytic converters varies, based on: make/model, whether it’s an after-market part, what time period it’s from, and whether it’s foreign or domestic. According to the dealer, some of these converters are worth only \$10. However, some thieves will travel to places like New York to questionable scrap metal dealers for a larger payoff. So it appears that many thieves may find themselves destroying cars and facing jail time for a potentially small reward.

So how do you know if your catalytic converter was stolen? Your car will make a loud rumbling sound when the engine is turned on, which will get louder when you step on the accelerator. The vehicle may also make sputtering noises as you change speed.

Here’s how to ward off thieves from potentially stealing your catalytic converter.

- Try to park in an area that is well-lit or close to an entrance with increased pedestrian traffic.
- If possible, park your vehicle in a garaged or gated area.
- Install motion sensing lights near where the vehicle is parked outside.
- Engrave your VIN number onto the catalytic converter. This will help to identify the vehicle owner.
- Some vehicle security systems can be calibrated to detect vibrations. If possible, make sure that yours is set to detect vibrations.
- If something doesn’t appear right, contact your local police. See something, say something!

Hodar, David. (2019, February 10). The Wall Street Journal. *Thieves Mine Catalytic Converters for Metal More Valuable Than Gold*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/thieves-mine-catalytic-converters-for-metal-more-valuable-than-gold-11549803601#:~:text=There%20are%20about%20two%20grams,to%20steal%20a%20catalytic%20converter.>