



Richfield Police Crime Prevention Unit

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Catalytic Converter Theft Prevention

The Twin Cities area, including Richfield, continues to see thefts of catalytic converters from vehicles. Some suspects have been arrested for these thefts, but it is believed there are several groups perpetrating the crime. The thieves, usually working in groups of 2-3 people, will typically pull up next to the target vehicle, jack it up a bit to make it easier to slide under and access the part, then cut the catalytic converter with a power tool. The whole process only takes a few minutes to complete. The thefts have been reported as occurring during daytime and overnight hours.

A catalytic converter is an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) exhaust emission control device that reduces toxic gases and pollutants in exhaust gas from an internal combustion engine into less toxic pollutants. Converters are typically found beneath the vehicle as part of the exhaust system.



Catalytic converters contain precious metals (platinum, palladium and rhodium) and can be sold to scrap dealers for \$150-\$500 each; they have no serial numbers or identifying markings so are virtually untraceable and are easy to remove from vehicles which make them desirable to thieves. Replacement cost can be up to \$3,000.

In June 2021, Minnesota lawmakers agreed to fund a new pilot program aimed at deterring catalytic converter thefts, which have skyrocketed in recent months along with the price of the precious metals. The state will direct \$400,000 toward a new pilot program, which would pay for car owners to have their catalytic converters engraved with their vehicles' identification numbers or otherwise permanently marked so the parts could be identified if removed. (We're anxiously awaiting more details about this pilot program!) Under current Minnesota law, it's a crime to possess property known to be stolen or reasonably suspected of being stolen. Hopefully, engraving catalytic converters will not only deter scrap metal dealers from buying marked catalytic converters but will also deter thieves from stealing them in the first place.

Some prevention tips suggest using high-temperature (1,300 to 2,000 °F), automotive exhaust or BBQ grill spray paint in a bright color, to spray a generous amount onto the converter to create a visible deterrent to alert thieves to move on. (The premise is that the paint will signal law enforcement



and recyclers to look deeper for serial numbers or identification marks.) Another prevention tactic is temperature resistant decals. The problem with both of these methods is that stolen catalytic converters can be repainted and stickers can be scrapped off. Some determined thieves will even grind off VIN numbers that have been engraved on converters. Ultimately, any preventative measures are better than none.

Please be aware of the potential for this type of theft and take precautions to prevent it. Watch for suspicious activity around vehicles that are parked. Listen for the distinct sound of grinding metal. **Again, if you have a garage, park your vehicles inside.** If you park your vehicle outside overnight or leave your vehicle parked unattended for an extended period of time like when at work, park close to your building where your vehicle can be seen or if during night time hours, park near or under a light. If you notice any suspicious activity around parked vehicles, **call 911 immediately**. Note a physical description of the suspicious people and vehicle they are driving and report that to the dispatcher. Be available for further follow up from an officer should they need to contact you after responding to the theft.

Other Ways to Protect Your Vehicle

- **Always lock vehicle and set the alarm.**
- **Park in a locked garage or secured parking area.**
- **Install a bright motion sensor light and camera to discourage potential thieves.**
- **Install an anti-theft (cage) device. Some local auto shops also install cable lock systems.**

Please share this information with family and friends to help spread the word so everyone is informed and can take precautions to protect their vehicles.