



City of Takoma Park

## **Takoma Park Police Department**

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### **Message from the Chief of Police Regarding Thefts from Autos and Thefts of Catalytic Converters**

From May 1, 2020 – February 13, 2021, we've had 190 reported thefts from autos in the City of Takoma Park. Property stolen from inside vehicles included purses, money, credit cards, cell phones, laptops, gym bags, sunglasses, tools, etc. In 24% of the thefts, forced entry was made into the vehicle. In 22% of the thefts, no entry was required (i.e., a tag or catalytic converter\* stolen off of the vehicle). In 54% of the thefts, there was no forced entry.

*\*Hybrid cars, such as the Prius, are targeted by thieves for catalytic converters because they have two power sources –an electric motor and a petrol or diesel engine – so their catalytic converters are used less frequently to process pollutants. This means the metals inside them are less likely to corrode, so they're more valuable and therefore more desirable to thieves.\**

#### **Catalytic Converters**

A catalytic converter is a device incorporated in the exhaust system of a motor vehicle, containing a catalyst for converting pollutant gases into less harmful ones. If you take a look inside a used catalytic converter, nothing looks salvageable, much less valuable. But some of the gray gunk in there can be processed to go into pricey jewelry -- and because of this, the grimy auto parts are becoming prime targets for thieves. There are three types of precious metals that can be processed out of all the gunk found inside a used catalytic converter, and those metals make the street value of a catalytic converter high.

#### **Symptoms of Converter Theft**

You will notice a loud rumbling or roaring sound as soon as you turn on the engine if your catalytic converter is missing. This gets louder when you hit the gas. The exhaust is not working properly, so the vehicle also drives rougher than usual, often with a sense of sputtering as you change speed.

Go to the back of the car and look underneath. The catalytic converter is a round canister that connects two pieces of piping in the exhaust. You will see a gaping space in the middle of your exhaust if the converter is missing, and you will likely see signs of the piping being cut away.



### **Preventing Catalytic Converter Theft**

Always park in well-lit areas when possible. If you have a personal garage, keep your car in the garage with the door closed when the vehicle is not in use. Park close to a building entrance or to the nearest access road when parking in a public lot. This is due to the increased amount of pedestrian traffic in those areas.

Security devices are available that attach to the converter, making it harder to steal. Having the converter welded to the car frame also makes it more difficult to remove. If you have a security system on your car, calibrate it so vibration sets it off. This ensures the alarm activates if a thief tries to saw off the converter. Video surveillance around your garage or driveway is also useful if you have the budget for it.

Engrave your VIN number onto your catalytic converter to make it easier to identify in case it does get stolen.

## **What to Do in the Event of Theft**

Notify the police department as soon as you discover your catalytic converter is missing. If you have your VIN number engraved on the device, give them that number as well. Call local scrap yards to inform them of the theft, especially if there is an engraved number on the converter that they can verify. Give them your phone number so you are notified in case your converter shows up at a scrap shop.

Diligence is your best defense against catalytic converter theft. Pay attention to local news reports so you are aware of any theft increases. While there is no guaranteed method of preventing theft, the goal is to make your car as unattractive a target as possible.

The more inconvenient your vehicle is to get to, the more likely a thief moves on to an easier target.

The biggest help a community can give its police force is information; when you see something out of the ordinary, suspicious person(s), or vehicle(s), call and report it. The fact of the matter is that we cannot be everywhere at once; we need your eyes and ears to help us in our efforts of making our community as safe and crime free as possible.

If they see it, they can steal it! We ask that you continue to keep your valuables safe and be sure that your purse, cell phone, laptop, or other valuables are not left lying in plain view in your vehicle, be aware of whether or not you locked your vehicle, and make sure you have your keys with you at all times; these are all situations of opportunity that criminals look for to victimize good law abiding residents.

We are wise enough to know that no matter where we live there will be some type of crime that occurs. However, we can make it more difficult for the thieves to steal property by following some basic crime prevention tips, such as removing valuables from your vehicle, or hiding your valuables from plain view (such as in your trunk), locking your vehicle, and taking your keys - you are less likely to be a victim.

Let's make a difference together! If you see suspicious activity, on the street or in a

parking lot, call Takoma Park Police at **301-270-1100**. And, please remove all valuables from your vehicle.