

# Cerritos Neighborhood Watch Report

July 2008

## Hardening the Target

### Catalytic converters are stolen from cars and sold for fast cash

As the prices of precious metals continue to increase, thieves are targeting a component of automotive exhaust systems: the catalytic converter. Police and automotive experts say that the part can be stolen in less than a minute.

The catalytic converter has been a mandatory part of exhaust systems since 1975. Police across the country say they have seen a dramatic rise in thefts of the converters in recent months.

When looking inside a used catalytic converter, nothing looks salvageable, much less valuable. But hidden inside are three expensive precious metals: platinum, palladium and rhodium. Although catalytic converters have only small traces of the metals, there's enough in them for a thief to resell stolen units for up to \$200 apiece. Rhodium is among the most expensive metals on Earth, commanding as much as \$6,000 per ounce on the open market. Platinum and palladium are also expensive. Scrap dealers are paying top dollar for these metals, because they bring in high profits when they are resold.

The converters are inviting targets because they're mounted on the exterior undercarriage of vehicles, and can be removed in about a minute with any standard metal cutting tool. An enterprising thief in a crowded parking lot or garage can make off with enough converters to make \$2,000 to \$3,000 in 30 minutes.

These thieves are targeting shopping malls, school parking lots and busy business districts, and often

hit these places during the day. Many large passenger cars, such as SUVs, trucks and vans, have two catalytic converters, making them even more enticing as a target.

Besides rendering the exhaust system inoperable, a car missing a catalytic converter can be dangerous. On some cars, if the converter's pipe gets cut off near wiring or a fuel line or gas tank, a fire and/or an explosion could occur.

According to the Los Angeles Police Department's Burglary Unit, the Toyota 4-Runner's catalytic converter is the most common target of thieves. The 4-Runner sits high off the ground, and its converter is attached with four bolts that are easily sawed or cut off, which makes it simple for thieves to duck underneath the vehicle, steal the converter and be gone in seconds. Most of the reported catalytic converter thefts reported to the Cerritos Sheriff's Station have been from 4-Runners. The Kia Sportage, which is built similarly to the 4-Runner, is also a popular target. Sportages are the easiest vehicles to get under and the con-



*Catalytic converters are most commonly stolen from Toyota 4-Runners, such as the one pictured above.*

verters on this car are the easiest to remove. However, any vehicle made after 1975 is a potential target.

Although a catalytic converter theft could happen in your driveway, these thefts tend to occur in high-volume parking lots and garages where dozens of vehicles are lined up.

The Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, a national trade association, said there were no national statistics on the pilferage of catalytic converters, which are generally lumped in with other motor vehicle burglary incidents. But the Institute said that there has been a sharp rise in reports of thefts, and it urged scrap dealers to be suspicious of anyone walking in with a converter.

Unfortunately, there's not much a scrap metal recycler can do. Catalytic converters don't have serial numbers, so they can't be tracked. This makes it nearly impossible for a scrap metal dealer to identify a stolen converter. While police say that drug addicts are most frequently found responsible for the thefts, the treasure in the exhaust system is rich enough that it can lure anyone wishing to make money for little work.

Check with your auto dealer or mechanic and determine if the catalytic converter on your vehicle is susceptible to theft, and if so, inquire if the converter can be welded to your vehicle. This usually deters the thief because it makes the theft more labor-intensive. Also, catalytic converters can be etched with an engraving device with identifying information.

# Monthly Crime Summary: June 2008

Cerritos Sheriff's Station personnel investigated 120 Part I felony crimes in June, up from an adjusted figure of 115 in May. (Adjusted figures result from additional crimes reported after the end of the month that are attributed to the previous one, or when investigation reveals that a crime did not occur or was reclassified). Vehicle burglaries and vehicle thefts increased, residential burglaries decreased, and robberies remained the same in June as compared to May. As of June 30, Cerritos Station field personnel were handling a weekly average of 316 calls for service.

## Robberies

There were five robberies investigated by Cerritos deputies in June. Five robberies also occurred in May.

A man walking his dog on Pioneer Boulevard near 195th Street on Thursday, June 5 at 12:30 a.m. was approached by a male suspect on a bicycle. The suspect simulated a handgun and demanded the victim's money. In fear, the victim attacked the suspect, forcing him to flee. Deputies arrested the suspect hiding nearby, and took him to a local hospital where he was treated for lacerations and bruises before he was booked.

Another suspect on a bicycle

simulated a handgun and robbed two male victims of a cell phone and cigarettes on Sunday, June 8 at 9:30 p.m. in the 13000 block of Acoro Street.

On Tuesday, June 10 at 8:27 p.m. two male suspects entered a restaurant in the 11900 block of South Street and used physical force to rob the cash register.

Two male teenaged suspects forced another male juvenile to give them his money on Monday, June 16 at 10:20 p.m. in the 12400 block of Ashcreek Road.

On Monday, June 23 at 8:40 p.m., a male suspect approached a woman and man walking in the 19800 block of Bloomfield Avenue and demanded their property (cash, credit cards, and rings), which the victims relinquished out of fear.

## Residential Burglaries

Cerritos Sheriff's Station investigated four residential burglary cases in June, the lowest monthly total in five years. Fifteen cases were reported in May. The June incidents involved three open windows and a side garage door that was kicked in. A television, washer, dryer, matches, garage door opener, jewelry, laptop computer and cash were taken. The 2008 weekly average in residential burglaries was 2.9 at the end of

June, which was the lowest weekly average in two years.

## Vehicle Burglaries

There were 37 vehicle burglaries investigated in June, up by two crimes from May. High-volume commercial parking lots were the crime scenes in 14 of the incidents. Twenty-three of the burglaries occurred in residential neighborhoods, and for the second consecutive month, analysts have noted a shift away from high-volume parking lots. (Many of the vehicle burglaries in residential areas involved GPS units that were stolen in the early morning hours). Seventeen SUVs were involved and nine car stereo items were taken. Property reported stolen in addition to GPS units consisted of briefcases, cash, cameras, cell phones, beach mats, tools, clothing, third row seats from SUVs and a Bible. The weekly average in vehicle burglaries at the end of May was 8.1.

## Vehicle Thefts

Vehicle thefts rose from 18 cases in May to 27 in June. Twenty-four vehicles were taken from high-volume commercial parking lots. Nine SUVs, four Hondas and five Toyotas were among the stolen vehicles. The new weekly average at the end of June was 5.0.

## Invest in a residential burglar alarm system

The Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center receives numerous calls about the feasibility, financial investment and effectiveness of residential burglar alarm systems. Statistics and debriefings reveal that residential burglars' worst enemies when plotting their crimes are dogs and alarm systems. If one or the other exists, the burglars typically seek another residence where their presence will not be detected.

Residential alarm systems can be an extremely effective crime deterrent, whether or not you have a dog.

Systems can be customized for the specific needs of the residents. Door and window contacts, motion

detectors, smoke detectors and even surveillance cameras can be placed within the home and outside for the desired coverage. Systems can be set up to run only when the home is unoccupied or provide perimeter coverage when the home is occupied. While not all customers need or even want maximum coverage, homeowners can pick the system that gives them peace of mind. Stand-alone systems produce an audible alarm when a zone or portal has been breached, although the best defense is a monitored system that can contact law enforcement when a breach occurs.

Generally, burglars look for a

way to get into a side or back yard where they can work without being seen. Side garage doors are also commonly used for entry. These are areas a security systems representative can help you fortify along with the priority of residential burglars: the master bedroom.

After installing an alarm system, make sure to obtain the required alarm permit from the City. To get the free permit, call the Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center at (562) 916-1266 or visit [www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/cityserv/publicsafety/alarm\\_application.html](http://www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/cityserv/publicsafety/alarm_application.html) to fill out a permit application.

Safety Contacts:  
Community Safety Division -  
(562) 916-1266  
Sheriff's Station - (562) 860-0044



To join Cerritos Neighborhood  
Watch, call Management  
Analyst Mike Yach  
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