



Catalytic Converter Theft and the Trucking Industry

Consumer Protection, Technology & Utilities Committee

Rebecca K. Oyler

June 6, 2023

Chairman Matzie, Chairman Marshall, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to participate in this important discussion about catalytic converter theft and steps we can take to prevent it. My name is Rebecca Oyler, and I am President and CEO of the Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association (PMTA). First, I would like to thank Rep. Isaacson for addressing this important issue by introducing HB 791, which PMTA supports in the effort to stop the epidemic of catalytic converter theft.

PMTA represents about 1200 members of the trucking industry, but we speak on behalf almost 69,000 companies that drive trucks in Pennsylvania, the vast majority of which are small, locally owned businesses like farmers, contractors, landscaping companies, utilities, trash and recycling haulers, foodbanks, and even hospitals. Trucks are an integral part of Pennsylvania's economy, transporting more than 96% of our manufactured tonnage and ensuring that businesses and consumers have access to the goods they need in every facet of life.

Over 341,000 hardworking Pennsylvanians are involved in trucking in the Commonwealth, accounting for one in every 15 jobs, which is a testament to how critical the industry is to our economy.

As you know, catalytic converters are an essential component of a vehicle's exhaust system that reduces pollutants in their emissions, including hydrocarbon, carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, and carbon dioxide. They also increase an engine's performance by making it more responsive and stable at top speeds.

Catalytic converters have been required in vehicles since 1975 by EPA regulations under the Clean Air Act. However, their theft has more than doubled in recent years, and it is becoming a significant problem. In large part, this is due to the increased values of the precious metals in their core. The trend is exacerbated by the lack of identifying information on most catalytic converters that makes tracking them back to their owners difficult.

Platinum, palladium, and rhodium, which can be extracted from these components, have grown in value in recent years and are worth more per ounce than gold. As a result, there is a strong black market for catalytic converters, which HB 791 attempts to address by requiring that additional information be collected at scrap processors and recycling facilities. HB 791 would not prevent legitimate recycling but would put some breaks on thieves trying to offload stolen catalytic converters.

All vehicles are targets for theft of catalytic converter, which often requires less than a minute to remove with a reciprocating saw. However, trucks are particularly vulnerable for several reasons:

- Many trucks have **more than one catalytic converter**.

- Truck catalytic converters generally **fetch high prices in the aftermarket**. Even small trucks, which are typically used by small businesses to haul their trailers, are in demand. The Ram 2500 and Ford F-250 are the 2nd and 3rd most expensive catalytic converters.
- Catalytic converters are often **more exposed and vulnerable to theft on trucks**, especially box trucks that sit high off the ground and are easier to slide under. Depending on the type of truck, catalytic converters are sometimes installed in locations where thieves can access them without jacks or even having to get under the truck.
- Trucks are often parked closely together at dealers, truck rental companies, and small businesses with truck fleets, allowing thieves to target multiple vehicles quicker and more easily. Catalytic converters from newer vehicles fetch a higher price than from older vehicles, making truck dealers an especially vulnerable target.

The impact on truck owners of this crime is also different than is typically the case for owners of cars. For many drivers, their trucks are their livelihoods. For small businesses, trucks are often the only way they can get to their job sites and customers, deliver their products, or provide their services. Putting their trucks out of commission puts their business out of commission.

And though a catalytic converter can fetch anywhere from \$25 to \$1000 at a scrap yard, replacement of the part by the truck owner can cost between \$1000 and \$2500 for the parts and the labor to install it. And of course, this doesn't factor in the cost of the time and business lost due to a truck being out of service and a driver sidelined.

There are countless incidences of catalytic converter theft in Pennsylvania in recent years that are unfortunate examples of this. Here are just a few: a family-owned fireplace store in Larksville having both catalytic converters stolen from its only truck; a local HVAC parts distributor's trucks targeted last year; family farm trucks stripped of catalytic converters in Brownsville, and 14 work trucks with stolen catalytic converters at a business in Upper Moreland. In January, three men were charged in Allegheny County with stealing catalytic converters from dozens of businesses and individuals in three counties, including tow trucks.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to discuss this issue. I am happy to take any questions you may have.