

Americans love their automobiles. Every year there are around 17 million cars, trucks, and SUVs sold in this country. We wash and polish our cars, customize our cars, and some even name their cars. Automobiles are deeply engrained in our culture, especially for those of us who live in greater Minnesota. When looking at our vehicles, most of us associate them with things like transportation, freedom of movement, or our next vacation road trip.

However, when a thief looks at your vehicle, he sees his next paycheck. The eyes of the thief see all the valuables you left in plain view in your vehicle. The eyes of the thief gaze at the catalytic converters attached to the vehicle's exhaust system. The eyes of the thief try to gauge how much fuel might be in your vehicle's tank. The robust inflation going on in the price of goods and commodities has made all the valuable things about your vehicle even more enticing to a thief.

With few exceptions, theft is a crime of opportunity. Generally, a thief will look for the opportunity that offers the most gain for the least amount of effort. The key to preventing theft is to make your stuff as difficult or as risky as possible for the thief to steal.

The thief who is looking to steal the things from inside your vehicle is most easily kept away by people who take valuables out of their cars or at least keep them hidden out of sight. Electronics, cell phones, or cash and change will quickly attract a thief's eye, making them target your vehicle. Equally important is the step of always locking all doors. Vehicles do have lots of glass that can be broken to gain access to a locked vehicle, but generally thieves aren't looking to invest the effort required to break the glass or take the chance on someone hearing the commotion caused by the breaking glass. As a rule, thieves eyeing up the things inside your vehicle are working a numbers game, pulling the door handle on dozens of vehicles in a neighborhood in search of the ones that are left unlocked.

For a thief, the underside of your car holds a few hundred-dollar bills. Stolen catalytic converters are sold routinely for hundreds of dollars each. The rising price of fuel means that your vehicle is routinely holding anywhere from \$50 to \$200 in fuel. While both commodities are attractive to thieves, the good news is that removing them from your vehicle requires some time and work. Stealing catalytic converters requires the thief to get underneath your vehicle and make at least 2 cuts through your exhaust pipes for each converter. Fuel, whether siphoned out of a tank or removed through a hole cut in the tank, takes time to drain and capture. Your first line of defense against this thief is to make your vehicle as visible as possible. The last thing a thief wants is to be seen as he works to steal things. Whenever you can, park your vehicle in areas that are well-lit and well-traveled. Good surveillance systems and signs providing notice of surveillance cameras are also good theft deterrents. Many companies make physical barriers you can mount on your vehicle to make it even more difficult for thieves to steal either catalytic converters or fuel. These barriers are another useful tool in encouraging thieves to look elsewhere for their next victim.

Finally, an engaged and watchful public is a great theft deterrent. Reporting suspicious activity right away provides law enforcement the chance to find and catch thieves quickly. Your call to law enforcement could mean the difference between a thief ending the day with a fat wallet or a sad stay in jail.

Thieves are always on the prowl for a chance to make an easy dollar. Do your part to make their job as difficult as possible. For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You

can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.