

VINCE FONG

MEMBER FOR THE 32ND ASSEMBLY DISTRICT



FACT SHEET

AB 641 – Combating Catalytic Converter Theft and Unlicensed Dismantling

IN BRIEF

An estimated 1,600 catalytic converters are stolen in California each month and victims' repair costs are as much as \$4,000.¹

Assembly Bill 641 cracks down on rampant catalytic converter theft and unlicensed dismantling by closing a loophole that prevents charging thieves found in possession of multiple detached converters with a crime.

Specifically, the bill requires individuals with six or more catalytic converters cut from a motor vehicle to register as automobile dismantlers.

BACKGROUND & ISSUE

Catalytic converters are a necessary part of the exhaust system on internal combustion engine vehicles. The converter contains rare metals that can be worth up to several thousand dollars. Rhodium is worth eight times the price of gold at over \$14,000 per ounce. Perpetrators can remove a converter in minutes using basic tools and quickly sell it on the black market. This theft props up unlicensed dismantling and black market smelting operations which pollute the environment and harm public health.

California is experiencing a dramatic rise in catalytic converter theft. Catalytic converter theft claims increased 175 percent in California from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, and California accounts for 37 percent of all converter theft claims nationwide.^{2,3} When suspected criminals are caught with a cache of converters, it is nearly impossible to

file charges for theft because the victim cannot be identified.

SOLUTION

By requiring individuals in possession of six or more catalytic converters to register as automobile dismantlers, thieves caught with converters could be charged with unlicensed vehicle dismantling, regardless of whether the catalytic converters can be tracked to a victim. Unlicensed vehicle dismantling is currently a misdemeanor with fines ranging from \$250 to \$1,000 per offense.

Under AB 641, individuals and businesses with a legitimate purpose for possessing catalytic converters, such as a motor vehicle repair business, will remain exempt from registering as an automobile dismantler.

AB 641 will discourage catalytic converter thieves, and bring relief to California motorists.

SUPPORT

California District Attorneys Association
California New Car Dealers Association
California Police Chiefs Association
California State Sheriffs' Association
Carmax Auto Superstores West Coast, Inc.
National Insurance Crime Bureau
Riverside Sheriffs' Association

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¹ <https://www.bar.ca.gov/pdf/bag/202110/catalytic-converter.pdf>

² <https://www.latimes.com/california/newsletter/2021-08-02/catalytic-converter-theft-essential-california>

³ <https://calmatters.org/economy/2022/10/california-is-a-hotspot-for-catalytic-converter-theft-will-new-laws-make-a-difference/>