

CRIME

Undercover Mesa cops bust accused catalytic converter thieves

Three suspects have been arrested for allegedly stealing and selling stolen catalytic converters from parked cars.



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MESA, Ariz. — An undercover operation carried out by the Mesa Police Department has resulted in the arrests of three men suspected of contributing to the increasing prevalence of catalytic converter thefts in Arizona.

Catalytic converters are part of a vehicle's exhaust system and have become a prized possession for thieves looking to cash in on their valuable metals.

Mesa has seen its case numbers for converter thefts escalate rapidly over the last few years.

In 2018, the city reported only two cases of stolen converters. So far this year, Mesa has had more than 400 cases.

The agency partnered with the Arizona Attorney General's Office to launch an undercover operation earlier this summer to crack down on its booming number of converter thefts.

Officers would buy stolen converters from various suspects or attempt to sell converters to buyers willing to purchase stolen car parts.

The operation resulted in officers arresting Federico Gutierrez and Christopher Frenci on suspicion of burglary, criminal damage, and trafficking stolen property.

A third suspect, Anthony Toledo, was arrested on suspicion of buying stolen goods.

Mesa police said one of the suspects has been tied to a burglary at a local auto recycler where 141 converters were stolen for an estimated value of \$40,000.

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