Wasilla man charged with stealing catalytic converters

By Dan Joling, Associated Press

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A Wasilla man suspected of stealing catalytic converters from at least 21 vehicles has been charged with 52 felony and misdemeanor counts of theft, criminal mischief and trespass.

Tristen Balthazore, 24, was arrested Wednesday, Alaska State Troopers announced. He was jailed at the Mat-Su Pretrial Facility and scheduled for arraignment Thursday. Online court documents do not list his attorney.

He is charged with 22 counts of felony theft, 19 counts of felony mischief, one count of felony scheme to defraud and 10 counts of misdemeanor criminal trespass.

Catalytic converters are control devices on vehicles that reduce pollutants. They are relatively easy to steal and can be sold, troopers spokesman Ken Marsh said.

"Our troopers acknowledge that a market exists," Marsh said.

Catalytic converters contain precious metals that can be salvaged and may be sold to scrap yards for around $200, Marsh said.

"Replacement costs to victims, however, can be considerably more," he said after speaking to an investigator.

Thieves receive pennies on the dollar for catalytic converters. But replacing one stolen from a 2019 commercial semi could cost upward of $18,000, Marsh said.

"Those replacement costs and damages to the vehicle are reflected in the charges when thieves are caught," Marsh said.

Troopers working in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough started receiving reports of catalytic converter thefts in October. The Palmer Criminal Suppression Unit

of the troopers in January started a formal investigation. They determined that 21 vehicles had been targeted with $42,000 in losses.