

[Metro.net](#) (web)

Resources

► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

► [Ask the CEO](#)

► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#)
(web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

Metro Info

► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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This pile of car parts and batteries represents some of the allegedly stolen car parts seized by TSB deputies from the sting operation set up against a Compton wrecking yard, October 9. Photo courtesy of the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau.



Deputies Mount Sting to Catch Catalytic Converter Thieves

- Arrests follow thefts from cars at Green Line station

By JIMMY STROUP

(Oct. 16, 2007) Some Green Line patrons recently returned to the Lakewood station parking lot to find their cars' catalytic converters stolen from their parked vehicles.

Alerted to the growing problem, Transit Services Bureau deputies staked out the station, Oct. 9, eventually arresting three people in possession of a stolen converter they'd literally hacked off of the parked car.

"A brand new one is worth \$1,300," said TSB Capt. Pat Jordan. "There's precious metal inside so sometimes they'll break it open, strip it and sell the metal to a junk dealer."

After interrogating the suspects, TSB Det. Frank Richter and his team discovered where the suspects had intended to sell the stolen catalytic converter. They had allegedly used the El Patron wrecking yard in Compton to sell stolen car parts.

Deputies set up a sting operation, eventually selling three ostensibly stolen catalytic converters to two employees at El Patron, who were both

subsequently arrested.

A successful sting

The sting also uncovered an employee at the wrecking yard who was in violation of his parole and another who had an outstanding warrant for possession of narcotics with the intent to sell.

Shortly after those arrests, a search warrant was served at El Patron and deputies discovered that one cars on the lot was stolen. They also found half an ounce of marijuana on the property.

“Typically [thieves] drive around in the parking lot, looking for whatever model it is they want. Then they’ll jump out quickly and take [the converters] out,” Jordan said. “They’ve got to get under the car to get the converter, so if you see somebody getting under a parked car in one of these lots, we need you to be reporting that.”

Jordan said that Metro employees are in a unique position to be able to help avert possible theft because they’re regularly in the parking lots – whether using them to park or operating a bus or train nearby. He said any suspicious activity should be reported to the Transit Services Bureau at (323) 563-5000.