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Dear residents,

I have recently received correspondence with concerns surrounding the theft of catalytic converters. This crime type is increasing at a national level and is certainly starting to attract a lot more attention from government bodies.

Throughout 2020 the total offences within London reached around 15,000 crimes. I am hoping I can give you a brief overview of what we are doing and offer some reassurance that we are making every effort to reduce these numbers and prosecute offenders. Some of the offences do appear to be escalating to include threats, however these only account for a handful of crimes.

Catalytic converters contain precious metals including palladium, rhodium and platinum. These all bear high value on the scrap metal market with the former two substantially more expensive than gold. Exhausts from hybrid cars contain much larger quantities of these precious metals with the Toyota Prius, Honda Jazz, Lexus RX models and the Toyota Auris being the most targeted vehicles.

These crimes are usually committed by a team of three with cloned plates from a genuine insured vehicle that is placed onto another like for like vehicle. The plates are frequently swapped after offences with some cars having up to five sets of cloned plates. The suspects are itinerant and will travel large distances across multiple London boroughs and county boundaries to commit their crimes. They are not confined to one specific area and there are many active teams.

To summarise what we are doing; I am overseeing Operation Basswood. This is a South Area (Bromley, Sutton & Croydon) initiative to target Catalytic Converter thefts and we are the only Met BCU to form a dedicated team. Our role is to focus on proactive and reactive investigations. Obviously this is difficult for me to go into details and specifics, but there are a variety of deployments ongoing using an array of covert and overt policing tactics.

We are working closely with other boroughs within the Met but also external forces, particularly West Sussex, Surrey, Kent and the British Transport Police. Within South Area there have been 11 arrests over the past few months, with some offenders being sent to Crown Court for trial and convicted. I have been disappointed with recent convictions including suspended sentences or community orders which don't reflect the level of inconvenience and misery inflicted on victims, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will be looking to change our tactics to ensure the strongest possible outcome in future and to issue post-conviction orders to prevent reoffending.

From a reactive point of view, we take ownership and oversight of every investigation. They are quality assured for any missed opportunities including local enquiries and CCTV/images. We have forged a strong working relationship with Toyota and they have provided funding and assistance towards local crime prevention initiatives. We have also visited and inspected all of our local scrap metal dealers in partnership with the Council and the Environmental Agency.

Crime prevention is difficult as the offending behaviour does seem more brazen and some offences have taken place in broad daylight in supermarket car parks. What we have seen is that vehicles with Catlocs fitted are rarely targeted and I would consider them a reasonably priced investment. We have received some high quality footage from home CCTV systems including Ring doorbell and these have enabled us to identify and convict suspects, so these are also another option including for your own home security and burglary prevention. Always consider where you leave your vehicle and remain vigilant. I have seen numerous videos where suspects have abandoned their crimes when vehicles drive past or when they've been disturbed. I strongly discourage vigilante behaviour as these individuals do carry jack extension poles and there is a likelihood you may be injured. Be on the lookout, report any suspicious activity and don't assume someone else has called the Police. The more information we receive the better and a photo, registration plate or description could be the last piece of the puzzle.

If you have been a victim of this crime and it's had a significant impact on your wellbeing, or you are a repeat victim I would like to hear from you.

The team can be contacted at opbasswood@met.police.uk Please feel free to share this email address. But please also remember to call 999 if you do see suspicious activity or an offence in progress.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. I. Warnes'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name part being capitalized and prominent.

Inspector Stephen Warnes