



THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney Andrew M. Luger
District of Minnesota

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Four Men Charged for Their Roles in \$21 Million Catalytic Converter Theft Ring

MINNEAPOLIS – Four Minnesota men have been indicted for their roles in a multi-million dollar scheme to transport stolen catalytic converters across state lines, announced U.S. Attorney Andrew M. Luger.

According to court documents, from May 2020 through October 2022, John Charles Kotten, 41, of Hutchinson, Justin Tyme Johnson, 32, of St. Paul, Soe Nye Moo, 31, of St. Paul, and James Dillon Jensen, 34, of Minneapolis, and others knowingly participated in a lucrative scheme in which they acquired stolen catalytic converters and transported them across state lines to buyers who paid large sums of money for the stolen car parts. Catalytic converters are emission control devices that contain valuable, precious metals—including palladium, platinum, and rhodium—in their center or “core” to reduce the toxic gas and pollutants from a vehicle’s engine and filter them into safer emissions.

As part of the conspiracy, individuals who operated as street-level cutters stole catalytic converters from vehicles throughout the state of Minnesota and transferred them to Kotten or Johnson. At times, Kotten and Johnson met with cutters directly to buy stolen catalytic converters, other times they instructed cutters to transfer the catalytic converters to intermediary buyers acting on their behalf, such as Jensen and Moo. After receiving stolen catalytic converters, the defendants concealed and stored the inventory in preparation for shipment across state lines. After sorting, categorizing, and pricing out the anticipated loads, the defendants transported the stolen catalytic converters across state lines using rented U-Haul trailers and personal vehicles. Payments for the stolen catalytic converters were typically in the form of wire transfer, cash, check, or a combination thereof.

In order to conceal their scheme, Kotten and others purchased scrap or junk cars from individual sellers or at auction to make it appear as though they were involved in a legitimate automotive scrapping and recycling business in the event they were audited or investigated.

In total, the conspiracy yielded approximately \$21 million in payments to the defendants, most of which came from a small number of high-volume buyers based in New Jersey, Oklahoma, Colorado, and New York.

The indictment charges Kotten, Johnson, Moo, and Jensen with conspiracy to transport stolen property interstate. Kotten and Johnson are charged with interstate transportation of stolen property, conspiracy to commit money laundering, and false statements to a financial institution. Johnson was also charged with conspiracy to commit money laundering – concealment, and Moo was charged with possession of a machinegun. All four defendants made their initial appearances earlier today in U.S. District Court before Magistrate Judge Elizabeth Cowan Wright.

This case is the result of a joint investigation conducted by Homeland Security Investigations, IRS – Criminal Investigations, Minnesota Commerce Fraud Bureau, Minnesota Department of Public Safety, St. Paul Police Department, Anoka County Sheriff’s Office, Blaine Police Department, Blue Earth County Sheriff’s Office, Brown County Sheriff’s Office, Carver County Sheriff’s Office, Coon Rapids Police Department, Eagan Police Department, Fridley Police Department, McLeod County Sheriff’s Office, Montevideo Police Department, Plymouth Police Department, Roseville Police Department, and Sleepy Eye Police Department.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lindsey E. Middlecamp and Emily A. Polachek are prosecuting the case.

An indictment is merely an allegation and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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