

From: [Carson, Thomas \(USACT\)](#)
To: [Carson, Thomas \(USACT\)](#)
Subject: U.S. ATTORNEY Press Release -- Superseding Indictment Charges 3 More for Involvement in Scheme to Steal and Sell Catalytic Converters
Date: Wednesday, November 29, 2023 10:19:42 AM
Attachments: [KOLITSAS Alexander et al ss indictment.pdf](#)

U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
District of Connecticut*

www.justice.gov/ct

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 29, 2023**

CONTACT:
Tom Carson
Public Affairs Officer
(203) 821-3722
(203) 996-1393 (cell)

Superseding Indictment Charges 3 More for Involvement in Scheme to Steal and Sell Catalytic Converters

Vanessa Roberts Avery, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, James Ferguson, Special Agent in Charge, ATF Boston Field Division, and Harry T. Chavis, Jr., Special Agent in Charge of IRS Criminal Investigation in New England, today announced that four men have been charged with federal offenses related to their participation in a stolen catalytic converter trafficking ring.

On November 14, 2023, a federal grand jury in New Haven returned an eight-count superseding indictment charging **ALEXANDER KOLITSAS**, 29, of Wolcott; **YANQUEE RODRIGUEZ**, also known as “Yankster Rodriguez,” 27, of West Hartford; **MERVIN FIGUEROA**, 26, of New Haven; and **MICHAEL ALMODOVAR**, also known as “Eme ElColorado,” 30, of New Haven. Kolitsas and four other men were originally charged by indictment in August 2022.

As alleged in court documents and statements made in court, law enforcement continues to investigate the theft of catalytic converters from motor vehicles across Connecticut. A catalytic converter contains precious metals, can easily be removed from its vehicle, and is difficult to trace, making it a desirable target for thieves. The average scrap price for catalytic converters currently varies between \$300 and \$1,500, depending on the model and type of precious metal component.

The superseding indictment alleges that Kolitsas owned and operated Downpipe Depot & Recycling LLC (“Downpipe Depot”), which had a warehouse on Park Avenue in East Hartford. At Downpipe Depot, Kolitsas and a co-conspirator purchased stolen catalytic converters from a network of suppliers, including Rodriguez, Figueroa, and Almodovar. Kolitsas and his associate instructed their suppliers on the types of catalytic converters that

would obtain the most profit upon resale. Kolitsas and his associate then transported and sold the catalytic converters to recycling businesses in New York and New Jersey.

The superseding indictment further alleges that Kolitsas and his associate acquired and maintained firearms as Kolitsas's residence and Downpipe Depot's warehouse.

The superseding indictment charges Kolitsas, Rodriguez, Figueroa, and Almodovar with one count of conspiracy to commit interstate transportation of stolen property, an offense that carries a maximum term of imprisonment of five years, and with one or more counts of interstate transportation of stolen property, an offense that carries a maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years.

The superseding indictment also charges Kolitsas with one count of promotional money laundering, which carries a maximum term of imprisonment of 20 years, for using proceeds from the theft and sale of catalytic converters to purchase a Ford Transit Van. He also is charged with two counts of engaging in monetary transactions with proceeds of specified unlawful activity, an offense that carries a maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years on each count, related to his using Downpipe Depot funds to make a payment to a Mercedes Benz dealership in Florida, and to purchase a home entertainment system. Kolitsas also is charged with one count of possession of firearms by an unlawful drug user or addict, an offense that carries a maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years.

The superseding indictment seeks the forfeiture from Kolitsas of the Ford Transit Van, a 2018 Chevrolet Silverado, a 2016 Polaris Slingshot, a 2022 Toyota Supra, approximately \$55,000 in cash, and \$92,581 that is held in a Downpipe Depot bank account.

Rodriguez and Figueroa were arrested on November 15, 2023, and Almodovar surrendered to law enforcement yesterday. As alleged in statements made in court, during one incident, while Almodovar was in the process of stealing a catalytic converter from a car parked in a parking lot, he was interrupted by a witness, who used his cellphone take pictures of Almodovar. Almodovar attacked the witness, smashed his car window, cut him with the saw he used to steal the converter, and then fled. As alleged in the indictment, the day after this incident, Almodovar sold six converters to Downpipe Depot in exchange for \$2,180.

Each of the four defendants entered pleas of not guilty and are released on bond pending trial.

U.S. Attorney Avery stressed that an indictment is not evidence of guilt. Charges are only allegations, and each defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Four other individuals have been convicted of federal charges stemming from this investigation, which is being led by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation Division (IRS-CI), and the East Hartford Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lauren C. Clark and A. Reed Durham.

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