

COPPER THEFT EPIDEMIC

THE DRAMATIC RISE IN THE COST OF COPPER AND OTHER METALS HAS RESULTED IN A LARGE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF JOB SITES AND EXISTING BUILDINGS BEING TARGETED BY THIEVES AND “HUMAN TERMITES,” WHO HAVE STRIPPED OUT COPPER PIPE, WIRE AND OTHER MATERIALS AND SOLD THEM FOR SCRAP.



SAFEGUARD AGAINST COPPER THEFT

- More than \$650,000 in damages are done to an historic building awaiting conversion to condominiums by thieves who tore out copper piping and other fixtures.
- Over \$1.3 million damage is done to heavy equipment by desperate thieves who used a large excavator to rip out radiators from other heavy equipment. It turns out that the radiators are no longer made from copper, so they had no scrap value. The thieves are caught and arrested.
- An unattended building on a college campus is broken into and all plumbing fixtures, copper piping and electrical equipment is removed, resulting in approximately \$400,000 in damages.

Adequately securing raw copper stock, as well as equipment that contains copper components, will help ensure that this theft epidemic does not strike your premises. Increased security measures, such as surveillance cameras, better lighting, wireless alarms and watchman service, can aid in thwarting attempts at stealing this much sought after commodity.

BACKGROUND

The price paid for copper by scrap dealers has increased greatly in the last few years. The price paid has risen from \$0.70 per pound in 2001 to more than \$3.50 per pound today. In recent months, many prospective home buyers have tried to turn on the faucet during their

tours of vacant homes with their real estate agents, only to find that the reason no water comes out is because the copper plumbing pipes in the basement have all been torn out by thieves. Many facilities left vacant in recent years have been similarly attacked. Outside air conditioning units, whether roof mounted or at ground level, are oftentimes stripped of their copper components. Copper electrical cable, whether insulated or not, is stolen from substations and other public utility locations. Oftentimes vacant portions of occupied businesses are attacked, with the occupants thinking that the thieves are just workers who are performing renovations.

WHAT'S BEING DONE?

In response to this copper crime wave, 20 states have enacted new laws in 2007 making it more difficult for metal scrap yards to receive stolen copper. These laws require proof of identification from the seller, vehicle registration information and also that the copper is paid by check rather than cash and then mailed to the seller's residence or business. This makes it easier to track down the seller if the purchase proves fraudulent. Travelers is working with additional states to enact similar legislation, as soon as possible.

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OTHER REMEDIES

- Security guards should be on site during unoccupied times, whenever possible.
- Intrusion detection alarms should be installed and should be transmitted to police departments.
- Vacant properties should be made to look occupied.
- Properties should be kept clean with landscaping cared for, drives and sidewalks shoveled in the winter, automatic timers on indoor lights and motion detector lights on the outside.
- Police and neighbors should be alert and vigilant of suspicious activities, etc.
- There are companies that provide wireless tamper alarm systems that give off audible alarms or send signals when materials are disturbed.
- Other companies make traceable microchip identifiers that are adhered to copper wires, pipes or machinery. The posting of signs or decals indicating that the equipment or premises is protected is often enough to deter the thieves from attacking that location.
- When copper or other metal products are delivered to the site, it should be just in time delivery so that goods are not stored unnecessarily, which leads to an increased exposure to theft.
- Low-lux, low-light, high-resolution security cameras should be installed so that they cover all areas of the facility, especially the yard areas.
- The yard area should be arranged so that it would be very difficult to get a vehicle anywhere near the stored copper. The further the thieves have to carry away the copper, the more likely they are to get caught in the act.

MORE INFORMATION

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