

Copper theft

With the rising price and the high demand of copper, insurers and law enforcement see an increase of copper thefts. Thieves target copper wire, pipe, fittings and other components, such as residential air condition units or power stations containing copper. In addition, law enforcement is seeing a trend in thefts targeting catalytic converters from junkyards and underneath vehicles.

Various law enforcement studies are uncovering interesting statistics regarding copper theft. In parts of Texas, 40 percent of copper thefts occurred in homes under construction. Other thefts took place at plumbing and construction companies, hardware stores, and from delivery trucks. Of the thefts taking place at homes under construction there was evidence of forced entry in only 10 percent of the incidents. In 90 percent of the incidents, copper materials were staged or left in homes in the framing stage of construction or left unlocked. All thefts from these homes occurred overnight.

One law enforcement agency indicated the only common factor they found amidst the myriad of offenders was they did not limit themselves to one type of theft. They found that any one offender would steal wire, pipe, exhaust systems, refrigerators, radiators, etc.

While copper is certainly a primary target, brass and steel thefts are also on the rise. Spring and summer are the busiest times for these thefts. The increase seems to be tied to the busiest construction seasons. It is not unheard of for crimes to take place during business hours. In some instances, the thieves simply drove into a neighborhood, loaded their trucks with copper, brass or steel and drove away attracting no attention due to the level of activity at the site.

We encourage you to evaluate the status of your company's risk management programs and policies and make enhancements where needed. Your efforts will go a long way towards minimizing your company's exposure to copper theft and help control insurance costs.

STEPS TO AVOID BEING A TARGET OF COPPER THEFT

- As part of your hiring practice, consider doing a criminal background check on all applicants. This may give you additional insight into a prospective employee.
- Avoid storing copper wire, pipe, fittings and other components at remote jobsites. Even securing a parts trailer with a lock is not a deterrent to motivated thieves.
- Look at the security of your premises. Consider installing a security system that includes motion detectors and cameras. Although the initial cost may seem high, it can pay for itself, if it eliminates even one theft loss. Keep in mind a thief might enter your premises with the intention of stealing copper, but may find other objects to take.
- Just-in-time-delivery. If your business is to install copper wire, consider pre-cutting the wire and delivering what you need at a jobsite on a daily basis. This will avoid large quantities sitting at a job waiting to be used.
- Approximately 90 percent of all theft takes place on weekends, so have someone check the jobsite several times during the weekend. Provide sufficient lighting at night as a potential deterrent.
- Thefts often occur during the pre-drywall installation phase of construction. Consider this when planning a job. If possible, install copper at the end of the job. If this is not possible, painting the copper black gives the illusion of gas lines or other steel piping.



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- Build partnerships with local scrap companies in the area. Many recycling centers will not accept copper that has been painted.
- Inform law enforcement about construction sites and provide after hour and emergency contact information.

STEPS TO TAKE WHEN A COPPER THEFT OCCURS

1. Take pictures.
2. Protect the crime scene.
3. Preserve the evidence.
4. Talk with people who may have witnessed the crime.
5. Identify the cable markings. They reveal the cable's original location and can assist in identifying the suspect or provide an affirmative lead.

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