

# Risk Control Bulletin

## Preventing Metal Theft

The worldwide demand for nonferrous metals, such as copper and aluminum, has risen dramatically over the past few years, especially in China, and thieves are taking advantage of high scrap metal prices. For example, a CNA client had six roof-mounted air conditioning compressors stolen for their copper at a cost of over \$50,000. The client was out of business for two weeks until the compressors were replaced. Within 72 hours, those compressors were stolen too.

In another case, thieves broke into an apartment building over a weekend and destroyed six heating units by removing copper water pipes. There have been similar incidents in churches (copper sheathing, gutters and downspouts), schools (copper wiring), as well as construction sites and electric utility firms.

Stealing metal for scrap is nothing new, but with higher prices and more demand for these metals around the world, thieves seem to be getting bolder and are breaking into commercial and industrial buildings looking for larger gains. A November 2006 article published in the *Tucson Weekly*, titled "Copper Wars," reported that metal theft increased by 150 percent in 2006. In a similar article dated September, 2006, *The Dallas Morning News* reported that Dallas police have documented over 1,500 cases of metal theft through August, 2006, nearly doubling metal theft cases from 2003.

### What Do Thieves Look For?

- Copper coils in HVAC systems
- Copper flashing, gutters and roofs
- Wiring of all types whether in occupied, vacant or buildings under construction
- Piping in heating and electrical systems both indoors and out
- New wiring and piping brought in by contractors or being stored at construction sites

### Tips to Help Prevent Metal Theft

- Deny thieves access to roof-mounted HVAC equipment by removing exterior fixed ladders and cutting back trees and shrubs. However, do not remove fire escapes.
- Enclose HVAC equipment in secured, i.e., locked, metal cages. Anchor outdoor units to concrete pads.
- Improve exterior lighting, especially in high risk areas. Use motion sensors to turn the lights on and inspect them regularly to make sure they work.
- If possible, fence your property and secure all gates when the facility is closed. Post "No Trespassing" signs. This will help local law enforcement determine if any suspicious activity is taking place and keep thieves' vehicles away from your equipment.
- Secure equipment, materials, scrap bins, and vehicles that must remain inside your facilities.
- Review your access control system to make sure access to metal rich areas (heating plants, electrical transformers and substations) are denied thieves.
- If you have an existing security system, make sure all outdoor areas are covered if possible. Ask your security firm for an updated review of your system. It may be possible to install a pressure switch in the coolant line in your HVAC system and tie it into your existing system. When thieves cut the lines, the pressure switch is activated, setting off the alarm.

- Consult with local law enforcement and ask their advice in securing your property.
- If you are having any work done on your property, make sure you or your contractor secure any copper wiring and piping.
- Security cameras can be valuable but only if they are monitored.
- Secure your power shut offs or move them indoors. That way thieves cannot easily turn off powered equipment before removing it.
- Cut back greenery and review outdoor lighting to prevent areas where thieves can operate unobserved.
- If you have been a victim of metal theft, take preventive action immediately because thieves may return again and again.

For more information please call us toll-free at (866) 262-0540 or visit us online at [www.cna.com/riskcontrol](http://www.cna.com/riskcontrol)

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