



ISRI

Institute of
Scrap Recycling
Industries, Inc.

Voice of the Recycling Industry

July 24, 2008

Executive Editor
The New York Times

Dear Sir:

Your article of July 23, 2008, "Philadelphia Streets Unsafe for Manhole Covers," identifies an important problem plaguing the country these days, but leaves your reader with misinformation that needs to be addressed and rectified.

First, the clear implication of the article, especially considering the last paragraph's derogatory comment by Mr. Sergeant about the scrap yard, is that the scrap recycling industry is part of the problem of materials theft currently affecting communities across the country. That could not be further from the truth!

Over the last two years, the scrap recycling industry has adopted aggressive practices to minimize the likelihood of purchasing stolen materials, including requiring photo identification, recording license plates, keeping detailed records so information can be provided on materials should police suspect that materials have been stolen, keeping a list of suspicious materials and consistently questioning the ownership of these materials if they are brought to a scrap recycling facility, requiring the seller's signature on a receipt for each transaction and including a certification on the receipt that the seller is the owner or authorized seller of the materials, employee training, utilizing security video systems with time stamps to help track transactions, and requiring a contract or letter of authorization for the purchase of certain materials that have been identified as of a high risk to be stolen.

The fact is that no legitimate scrap dealer intentionally purchases stolen goods. Unfortunately the reality is that in most cases by the time the metal reaches a recycler it has been cut into pieces, stripped, crushed or otherwise transformed in such a way as to make it indistinguishable from the tens of thousands of pounds of legitimate scrap we purchase each day.

The Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI) reactivated its Theft Alert System more than two years ago specifically to address materials theft. When notified of a metals theft, an email is immediately distributed to all relevant contacts – not only here where the theft occurred, but in all surrounding cities and states, giving scrap yards notice to be on the lookout for the material. The system is available free of charge to all law enforcement communities nationwide and has proven to be a very effective tool at catching the criminals and also recovering stolen materials.

The reality is that scrap recyclers become the victims of materials theft as well, at both ends of the equation, with materials being stolen out of our yards, and the cost to our

businesses of devious attempts by criminals to sell stolen goods. Over the last year, more than half of the companies in the scrap recycling industry have themselves become a victim of this type of crime, with 58 percent of those companies being hit multiple times.

Just about two months ago as we saw ferrous scrap prices climbing significantly, ISRI sent out a press release alerting city governments across the nation that materials theft posed a serious and growing problem in the form of thefts of infrastructure metals, such as manhole covers. ISRI encouraged city governments to secure their infrastructure materials against possible thefts.

And the scrap recycling industry has been at the forefront of efforts to develop partnerships with local law enforcement agencies, public officials, and those victims of materials theft to actively address the issue at the local level. These coalitions have proven to be particularly successful in reducing the numbers and scope of material thefts in communities across the country.

Another point of clarification concerns the issue of how cities are pursuing the thieves involved in these material thefts. Fully recognizing that law enforcement agencies have their hands full, too many district attorneys and prosecutors consider materials theft to simply be a property crime that does not rank high on their agendas. If thieves are to fully appreciate the consequences of materials theft, they must be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Finally, while maybe a matter of semantics, the repeated use of the term “junkyards” to refer to scrap recycling centers seems to be both pejorative and overtly negative for no apparent reason. Today’s recycling centers are a far cry from the old “junkyards” of yesterday, processing more than 150 million tons of recyclable materials in 2007 and providing major economic and environmental benefits in the process. The scrap recycling industry is a \$71 billion industry in the U.S. alone, supplying raw material feedstock to steel mills, foundries, paper mills, refiners, and other industrial consumers worldwide.

The scrap recycling industry proudly works everyday to strengthen local economies, providing jobs for our neighbors and raw materials for manufacturers here and around the globe, while contributing to an industry that is in fact the world’s largest and oldest environmental industry. The scrap recycling industry has been and will continue to be committed to working with law enforcement, community leaders, and affected businesses to help stem the problem of materials theft, and ensure the safety and success of all communities. To learn more about the scrap recycling industry and its efforts to combat materials theft, visit www.isri.org/theft

Sincerely yours,

Robin Wiener
President
Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc.
1615 L Street, NW Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036
202-662-8512
robinwiener@isri.org