

Scrap Theft Bulletin

Provided by the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries



Rising Metals Prices Call for Increased Vigilance Against Theft

Metals theft prevention has been addressed in past issues of *BOLO News*. There are a number of reasons metals theft prevention and investigation may have dropped off the radar screen of police departments in recent months. Declining scrap prices and more pressing issues facing departments today are among the reasons. Nonetheless, prices are on the rise and prevention is key in assuring thefts do not also rise. Businesses have taken notice of rising prices and are taking steps to protect their properties and inventories; law enforcement should also take notice.

Metals theft statistics are hard to come by as few agencies keep a specific code for metals theft, often tracking cases as vandalism or theft. However, a good barometer for tracking thefts is the annual Forecast Report published by the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), which tracks insurance claims submitted for losses due to copper theft. The most recent report dated November 1, 2016, covers the period January 1, 2013, through December 31, 2015, and cites a decrease in claims for that time period. While this is good news, of significance in this report is NICB's claim of a "... significant positive correlation between metal prices and the number of metal theft claims"

This is important as copper prices bottomed out at \$1.95 in January 2016 – a post-recession low. But in the aftermath of the U.S. presidential election, copper prices **rallied more than 20 percent in just one week** and today copper is trading above \$2.70 per pound. Though off the highs of over \$4.00 a pound experienced in 2010 and 2011, prices are off recent lows.

In an article posted December 28, 2016, *The Wall Street Journal* reported businesses have taken notice of the increase in copper prices and are investing in security measures. According to this article, state legislators are also taking steps to prevent an increase in metals theft. Now is a good time for law enforcement to do the same.

Law enforcement is encouraged to establish or re-establish partnerships with local scrap recyclers. Another recommendation is for officers to register with ScrapTheftAlert.com (STA) and encourage others to do likewise. Based on first-hand feedback from registered law enforcement users, STA is more than an alert system, it can also function as a good intelligence tool. By reviewing alerts submitted from surrounding communities, officers can get a handle on what the hot ticket items are in their area. For instance, by taking notice of victims of theft such as public utilities, cell phone towers, or construction sites, departments might increase patrols in those areas and meet with security officials to ensure those areas are secure. Communication with stakeholders is key to fighting metals theft.

ScrapTheftAlert.com Success Story

On December 2, 2016, Union Pacific Railroad Police broadcast an alert for the theft of 45 reels of insulated solid copper wire in Caliente, NV. The wire was valued at more than \$26,000. With the aid of

Scrap Theft Bulletin

Provided by the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries

the alert, UP agents made three arrests and recovered the now stripped stolen wire. Additional charges against the three are pending.