



Metal Theft on the Rise CPRS Legislative Committee Gathering Data & Best Practices

Park and recreation agencies from Santee to Napa are reporting metal thefts. Park and recreation agencies are being hit due to the remote or dimly lit locations of equipment susceptible to copper or wire theft. The California Association of Park and Recreation Insurance (CAPRI) reported in their September 2011 newsletter, *CAPRI News* that the demand for metals is increasing due to the continued recession, skyrocketing price of metals, and the relative ease with which thieves steal. In addition to the cost to replace the wire, tubing, or equipment that is now non-functioning, there is loss of access for the public as events are cancelled or delayed and agencies have increased in labor costs to repair or replace the damaged equipment.

In 2001, the price of copper was approximately \$.70 per pound. Today the market cost is near \$4.00 per pound.

Santee reported over \$31,000 in repairs due to wire thefts from light poles. The poles had to be completely re-wired back into the control panel due to wire theft. San Pablo reported aluminum bleachers stole spectator seating! Tracy also reported aluminum bleachers and a flag pole were stolen. Several agencies reported brass plates used for dedication purposes are routinely stolen.

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The CPRS Legislative Committee is undertaking an investigation of the incidents of metal thefts to determine if there is a need for legislation to assist agencies with this issue. One of the first questions asked by a legislator is “how bad is the problem?” **CPRS needs to know the degree agencies are dealing with the impact of metal thefts.**
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California has several laws covering metal theft; the most recent one, AB 316, was signed into law September 2011. This bill classifies stealing, taking away, or carrying away copper materials which have a value exceeding \$950 as grand theft. This theft is punishable by a fine of \$2500, by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding one year, or by both a fine and imprisonment, or imprisonment in the state prison not exceeding 16 months, or 2-3 years imprisonment, and a fine not exceeding \$10,000.

While laws are helpful in prosecuting thieves once caught, the real issues are catching the thieves either in the act or trying to sell the stolen goods to metal recyclers and helping agencies pay for the damages caused by metal thefts.

CAPRI and Alliant Insurance Services, Inc. offers tips to eliminate and / or reduce the opportunity for metal theft:

1. Take “before” pictures and document potential metal theft opportunities. This will assist in assessing your risk and assist public safety agencies should a theft occur.
2. Cut back trees, hedges, shrubs & other vegetation to maximize surveillance and visibility. Do not give thieves “cover” for their illegal activities.

3. Install lights and timers to make the building or facility appear occupied. Consider allowing neighbors to park near your buildings or facilities even when they are closed.
4. Increase the “eyes” of the community. Enlist park neighbors to be on the lookout for metal thieves. Give them a number to call for any suspicious activity.
5. Install security lighting or increase the lighting around parks and facilities and air conditioning units. Carefully consider adding that if there is no one available to watch the space.
6. Install security cameras or alarms around possible locations of theft. (Santee purchased a surveillance system using a Homeland Security Grant.)
7. Spray paint (fluorescent paint) your copper tubing, wiring, or other metals. Scrap dealers consider these metals “dirty.” Use the same color, notify your public safety department and area scrap dealers what you are doing so they can be on the lookout for stolen materials. [Painted black copper pipe can appear to be black iron steel pipe from a distance.¹]
8. Lock it up: install locking mechanisms or secure cages especially around air conditioning units and lock covers for light poles and junction boxes.
9. Engrave your address on various locations on the metals (bridges, benches, ac units, copper tubing).
10. Ensure your buildings and parks are on the patrol routes conducted by public safety. Be sure their patrols are inconsistent.
11. Reduce your inventory of copper or metal supplies. Buy it when you need it.
12. Form a committee with public safety, local scrap metal recyclers, community members. This committee can share information, track thefts, search for new ways to combat thieves and create park/neighborhood watch groups.

Has your agency been hit by metal thieves? Gathering data about the impact this issue has on park and recreation agencies is the first step in determining if there is a need for further legislation.

How is your agency addressing the issue of metal theft? What steps has your agency undertaken to deter metal thieves? Sharing best practices will also assist agencies.

CPRS is looking for data regarding metal thefts; best practices on how to deter metal theft; and any ideas on legislative remedies. Send your data, best practices, and ideas to Jane H. Adams, CPRS Executive Director, at jane@cprs.org.

¹ “Preventing Copper Theft,” Alliant Insurance Services, www.alliantinsurance.com