



Risk Management Considerations for Copper Theft: Why is it Happening

What is Copper?

Copper is a chemical element with the symbol of Cu. It is a ductile metal with a very high thermal and electrical conductivity which is why it is highly valued. Copper is commonly found in electrical and telecommunication wiring and equipment, in both residential and industrial applications as well as in the majority of plumbing installations. Copper can also be used for decorative roofing, statues, monuments and jewelry.

What is Copper Theft and Why is it Occurring?

Copper is now being recognized as the new gold and thieves are risking imprisonment and death to obtain this precious metal. Scrap and recycling dealers are offering up to \$3.10 per pound for clean copper materials as of March 2012. Copper is 100% percent recyclable without any loss of quality. Over 40% of the world's copper production is produced from recycled materials; as stated by the Canadian Association of Recycling Industries (CARI).

Thieves are targeting:

- Construction Sites for copper piping, wiring, transformers and generators
- Vacant and foreclosed properties for copper piping, wiring, sprinkler systems and air conditioners
- Communication Towers for bus bars, wiring and cables

- Electrical Sub-stations for copper grounding bars and cables

Thieves create large financial damages – consider the cost of the stolen material, the replacement cost of the material, loss of services and business interruption. The security and safety measures that need to be installed to prevent copper theft is also quite costly.

Prevention, Safeguards and Security Measures

Copper theft has become an increasing problem over the past few years in conjunction with the downturn in the Canadian economy and the rise in copper prices as a result of the large demand for copper from other nations. Generally, the overall cost of the copper stolen can be relatively low compared to the cost of the repair or replacement of the equipment or infrastructure.

Safeguards and deterrents can be utilized to help control this situation and property owners should be aware of safeguards that can be instituted to reduce these thefts.

1. Installing security cameras in storage and yard areas. This could include motion activated or central monitored cameras.
2. Install sufficient exterior lighting.
3. Request additional patrols in the area from the local police service.

4. Employ or contract security personnel to monitor storage and yard areas during and after regular hours.
5. Conduct searches of employee belongings at the end of each shift and have confidentiality or nondisclosure agreements in place with employees, customers and distributors regarding the activities that are conducted on your premises.
6. Control access to high value storage areas.
7. Lobby the local government to pass laws that require all scrap or recycling dealers to obtain personal information from persons recycling these types of materials for cash.
8. If possible, have identification numbers stamped onto high value products or equipment to increase the chance of tracing the products.

Examples of Copper Theft

- Brantford, ON, April 2011– A person was charged with theft after copper wire was stolen from a hydro pole. Damage to the hydro pole was reportedly \$600.
- Oakville, ON, 2011 – Police are investigating the theft of a metre high copper statue of a Buddhist monk from a local cemetery.
- Georgina, ON, October 2011 – A person was arrested and charged with five separate counts of stealing large rolls of copper wire from a local construction company. The loss was valued at approximately \$50,000.
- North Bay, ON, March 2011 - Two persons entered a local business, they were arrested and charged with the theft of two spools of copper wire.
- Windsor, ON, January 2012 – The Greek Community Church, secured a vacant factory building to store new equipment and supplies in hope of creating a new community centre in the building. Thieves broke in and stole copper wiring, piping, and transformers resulting in an estimated loss of \$500,000.
- Windsor, ON, 2011 – A Chrysler Employee was arrested after trying to steal over 5,800 pounds of copper right out of the Chrysler Plants receiving gate.

The copper was reportedly valued at \$85,000.

- Toronto, ON, 2011 – Toronto Police wrapped up a six month investigation into copper theft with help from Hydro One and other corporate partners, four persons were arrested after approximately \$1,000,000 in copper and tools were stolen from local GTA Hydro One sites. The stolen copper was sold to a metal recycler in Hamilton.
- Welland, ON, August 2010 – Three persons broke into a ground level transformer box in attempt to steal copper wire and components, one of the individuals was electrocuted after coming in contact with high voltage components.
- New Annan, PEI, March 2012 – Thieves broke into the Cavendish Farms property and stole 350 feet of copper wire that was attached to the grounding system of the bio gas plant. The copper wire was reportedly valued at over \$5,000.
- South Granville, PEI, July 2012 – Thieves broke into the South Granville substation and stole copper wiring used to ground the substation.
- Halifax, NS – The Halifax District RCMP is reporting over 100 incidents of copper wire theft in 2011 and over 400 incidents since 2009, most recently thieves stole wire from light standards and entire lighting poles in two separate incidents. Reportedly totaling a cost of \$20,000.
- Botwood, NFLD – Thieves broke into the local substation and stole the grounding wire from three power lines resulting in a local power outage to 3,500 customers. The cost to repair the equipment totaled approximately \$25,000.
- Prince George, B.C - June 2011. – Thieves climbed telephone poles and stole over 300 metres of copper telephone lines, causing a power outage.
- Langley B.C. – 2008 – A person attempting to steal copper from an underground junction box was electrocuted when they cut a live wire carrying, 14,000 volts.