

Copper Theft Prevention: An analysis of current strategies in place to address the scourge

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Background & Introduction

Copper Theft has reached epidemic proportions and has already been branded by some as the Red Gold Rushⁱ. *“Cable Theft is draining the resources of City’s (Cape Town) Electricity Services and hampering our efficiency in attending to other public electricity complaints”* said Clive Justus, Mayoral Committee Member responsible for Cape Town Utilities in a recent media statement.ⁱⁱ The sudden rise in demand for this semi-precious metal according to Scott Berinato of DTE Energy, USA is said to have started in 2003 when the Grassberg copper and gold mine collapsed in Indonesia.ⁱⁱⁱ At this stage copper was still selling for 65 cents a pound on the London Metals Exchange. Losses of such mines coupled with the “emerging Asia” economy forced the copper price to rise to record highs of \$3 per pound within three years, with China being the biggest buyer. An interesting point to also note is that according to MoneyMorning.com copper value has increased at an average rate of about 4 percent a year every year since 1900^{iv}.

With the world entering a deficit condition (copper production fell below consumption) copper had to be sourced from somewhere and this led to metal theft reaching 100% increase year over year worldwide. Some countries and states were hit hard e.g. Dallas (USA) experiencing 1500 theft cases in the month of August, 2006^v.

Stolen copper ends up literally being laundered similar to money laundering in the following process as explained: Legitimization of stolen metal (copper) begins with mixing of stolen and “honest” scrap. It is then smelted, liquefied and out of this process comes copper cathode, the commodity that’s traded on the London Metals Exchange. Cathode is sheets or bars of copper, literally “red gold”.



Companies buying the metal extrude it, turn it into products e.g. plumbing and sell it to a contractor hence; an owner can buy back his stolen copper now as “clean” copper.

Those that steal copper to sell are called peddlers and these can sell to scrap dealers or even, in some instances depending on volume, directly to metal manufacturers. Scrapyards are seen as being a “kind of hinge of the metal supply chain”, meaning that they link the stolen goods with a market through which to travel. It is estimated that Copper Theft costs South Africa R5 billion per year^{vi} and due to this entities like Telkom is starting to push government to start charging thieves with sabotage.

Nature, Extent & Consequences of Copper Theft in Cape Town

Although power disruptions are usually caused by overload or defective circuit breakers, lamp failures or contact between tree branches and transmission lines, the City of Cape Town found that



in “hotspot” areas power disruptions are mostly caused by cable theft which in turn leads to traffic congestion, stranded rail commuters, colossal repair and replace costs, etc. The situation has reached the point where electricity staff and contractors in certain high risk Cape Town neighbourhoods have been assaulted on site and City trucks been stripped by gangs in broad daylight according to Clive Justus, Mayoral Committee Member for Utility Services, Cape Town. The modus operandi of these perpetrators is to come down on such workers in numbers wielding weapons and intimidating and/or assaulting personnel in order to obtain what they desire, so as to sell for, in most cases, drug money. Unlike other countries e.g. USA when it comes to targeting, South African Utilities and new developments are those targeted by cable thieves. The USA is amongst these further experiencing copper being stolen in bulk from scrap dealers

themselves. South Africa as a whole is at current not experiencing a serious risk in this regard. Cable Theft in Cape Town is primarily focused on overhead, underground and street lighting as well as robot cabling.

Effects like traffic congestions, stranded commuters, delayed housing projects, electrocutions, financial losses, etc are some of the risks brought on by this type of theft. Plagued by the widespread plundering of its substations and power lines, the City of Cape Town has been forced to keep certain areas of streetlights burning^{vii} during the day to help prevent and monitor the occurrence of cable theft. The rationale behind this move is said to be the fact that the City prefers spending R2,68 per day “energising” a 350m stretch of ten 70 watt streetlights as opposed to replacing cable at R38 500 per incident for the same length. On top of this, stealing cable from a burning streetlight as opposed to a switched off light raises the risk factor. Those wanting to continue stealing whilst the power is on run a serious risk of being electrocuted.

The primary targets experience reveals is substations and their transformers and utility lines (whether underground or overhead) and their transformers and underground cabling. These are also the most dangerous places to steal however according to medical studies drugs reduces the ability of the brain to assess risk before taking action.^{viii} In light of this, users of drugs like methamphetamine are not concerned about the risks involved and this serves a challenge in prevention. Theft at electrical substations is however not dangerous solely for the thief, but also for those that attends to the scene after ward, or just conducting a routine inspection, as such would be entering an unstable power environment. Experience has shown that most copper thefts relating to cable are small-scale (less than 30 meters at a time) and are perpetrated by transients without vehicles.

It is reasoned that perhaps the most obvious consequence of copper wire theft from electric utilities is the economic impact. Utilities or developments that were targeted always have to sit with the

after-effect of replace and repair either during or after the incident. This result in serious losses for those targeted and inadvertently at best inconveniences customers. Chetty of Telkom^{ix} commented in a recent article that “the increase in copper cable theft is creating an environment of a rapidly deteriorating service quality”. This is because continues sporadic breaks in connection does not speak to service quality. These thefts also reduce overall grid reliability which in turn can lead to increase in expenditure on security reliability or redundancy of the system. In turn customers sensing a less reliable grid are forced to invest in backup power generation.

Patterns & Trends

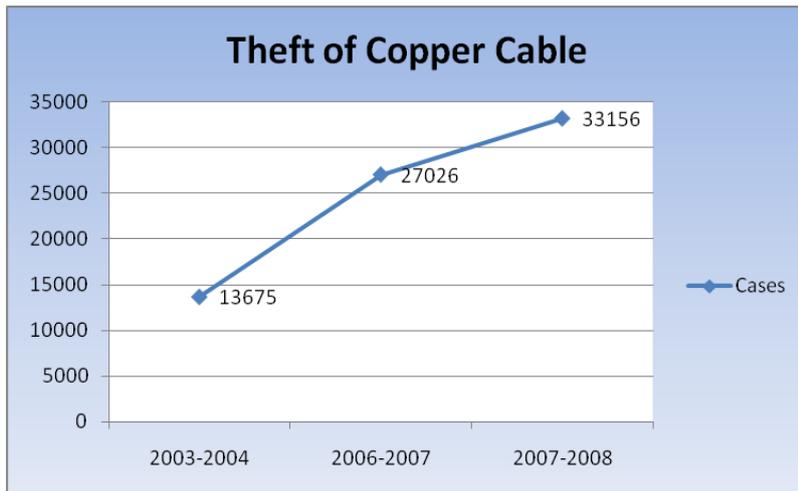
A trend in Cape Town reveals copper theft occurring predominantly against utilities and new developments. In considering the US Copper Theft Prevention Act of 2008 the United States Congress found the following issues^x: copper theft to be on the rise due to the surge in the global demand; the rise in the price of copper further spurred this on; and that there is a growing connection between the thefts and illegal drug activity. These are also the same findings that South Africa is making in understanding the drive behind copper cable theft. Agri Wes-Cape, in an independent study^{xi} found that as the price of copper increases so does the theft of copper. This fact was partly corroborated when the Copperheads found a notice outside a Cape Town bucket shop (illegal scrap yard) mentioning that the price they pay for copper fluctuates as the international copper price changes.

With copper reaching international highs of over \$8000 per tonne, it creates a serious motivation for cable thieves and dealers alike. The past three to four years has seen a steep rise in the price for this commodity and in comparison the South African Minister of Police released the following Cable Theft statistics:

| Period | Number of Cases |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2003/04 | 13 675 |
| 2006/07 | 27 026 |
| 2007/08 | 33 156 |
| 2008/09 | No figure provided |
| Total increase from 2003/04 to 2007/08 | Increase of 242% |

One can see a clear steep increase year on year from 2003. This is the spike period also for the price of copper internationally. All of the copper stolen is suspected of being traded at scrap dealers for cash, who in turn export the copper.

PTO for Graph



Metal Theft by Location

The following occurrences of metal theft globally provide some identification of pattern as it is clear that worldwide metals theft have a devastating effect on infrastructure and economy:

- Australia - Copper wiring was stolen from a variety of locations including rail tracks, power stations and scrap metal depots.
- Brunei - July to September 2005 a gang of thieves dismantled and stole parts from more than 60 power substations in the country.
- Japan - Reported 5700 metal theft cases in 2007.
- Russia - Telephone lines and electricity cables leading to military bases stolen in 2001.
- UK - Annual damage to industry due to metal theft estimated at 360 million pounds.

It is clear that Metals Theft is a global phenomenon and affects both infrastructure and economy, with copper theft being the most predominant form of metals theft.

Primary & Secondary affected stakeholders

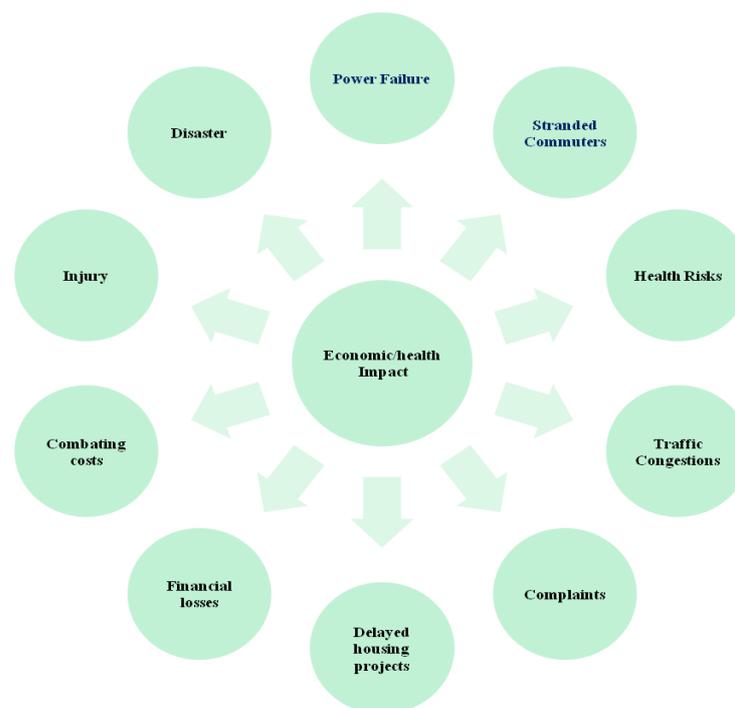
Although copper cable theft is predominantly focused on utilities and new developments these are not the only ones affected by the theft of stolen copper. Copper cable theft affects all the way from the everyday consumer to a countries' whole economy. What is mostly misunderstood is that cable theft does not only affect the utility involved but also those to whom such utility is providing a service and in turn to those whom such provide their services or products in turn. In light of this a countries' economy can be hugely affected if such a country's businesses cannot function due to consequences of cable theft. With this in mind one can start understanding why some call cable theft sabotage and want it treated as terrorism.

Primary Affected Stakeholders

Since utilities and developments are those mostly affected by cable theft (*they brunt the huge repair and replace costs*) these are seen as the primary stakeholders relating to metals theft, however this kind of theft also affect those that need to prevent/police it, as it increases expenditure on security measures. This increase refers to manpower to prevent the occurrences coupled with the requisition of expensive state-of-the-art high-tech equipment. In this regard the primary stakeholders in policing metals theft would include SAPF, Business, Parastatals (Utilities) & Local Government. It is thus clear that those directly affected by cable theft and those responsible to fight this crime are seen to be the primary stakeholders affected by Metals Theft (specifically copper cable theft).

Secondary Affected Stakeholders

The indirectly affected such as those receiving services and eventually the economy are to be secondary stakeholders in this regard. When cable theft happens we deal with indirect consequences like stranded rail commuters, traffic congestion, burglaries, and etc. all due to power outages. Power outages also forces production at plants and factories to a standstill that in turn leads company and eventually employment and economy losses. The following diagram explains the wheel-of-consequence related to metals theft:



Policies/Strategies in place and extent of such implementation

The New Act

The South African scrap metal industry is regulated by the new Second Hand Goods Act 6 of 2009 that replaces the old Act 23 of 1955 when it came into being in June 2010. The main issues that the proposed legislation had to deal with were:

- To recognise the different needs within the industry sectors. It is impossible to have the same rules for all the players in the second-hand goods industry, e.g. cellphones, household goods and jewellery;
- To create a regulatory framework suitable for all second-hand dealers to comply with by creating an environment conducive to business and policing;
- To involve the stakeholders in setting industry standards;
- To utilise skills and knowledge within the industry^{xii}.

The New Act further endeavoured to promote self regulation. It was promulgated on 1 April 2009 but only came into effect as from 1 June 2010. It also seeks to tighten up possible loopholes in the old act that became in certain ways outdated due to advancement in technology. The Electricity Act in South Africa does not cover instances of theft like for example the Electricity Act of Zimbabwe. Whereas the South African Act more related to issues of regulation, the Zimbabwean Act also includes a section dealing with theft/damage of infrastructure which carries a 10 year sentence^{xiii}. Providing for an offence committed under the Electricity Act makes it a specific crime that can be more effectively prosecuted and convicted. At current the approach is to prosecute cable theft under the Common Law theft offense that does not seem to give much attention to the devastating consequences of the actual crime committed. This impression is created when one considers the lack of conviction and if positively convicted, the miniscule sentences issued in this regard.

Gazing upon the Crime

The concern in dealing with copper cable theft has become so serious that some call for this crime to be placed under the same definition as terrorism in that it is said to constitute sabotage. In light of this the Inkatha Freedom Party tabled a Private Member's Bill in early 2008 seeking to amend the Protection of Constitutional Democracy against Terrorism and Related Activities Act 33 of 2004^{xiv}. This Bill's intention was to "provide for the extension of the definition of terrorist activities to also include activities aimed at the advancement of economic objective" of course alluding to pure financial gain. This stance even ignited support from then Acting Executive of Telkom's Asset and Revenue Protection Services, Thokozani Mvelase who called on government to clamp down on cable theft through greater legislative powers^{xv}. The challenge that the Private Member's Bill however faces is found in the definition of a terrorist act where it states: "terrorist activity, ...means any act committed in or outside the Republic...which is committed directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, for the purpose of the advancement of an individual or collective political, religious, ideological or philosophical motive, objective, cause or undertaking."

The defined challenge is that economic reasons need to come as an add-on to the definition, but could be seen as not falling in line with the penalty given under this act of terrorism. Under this Act a guilty party could be sentenced to life imprisonment where then it would stand to reason whether it would be fair to impose the same penalty on a cable thief.

Partnerships

Partnership between Business and Government led to the establishment of the Non-Ferrous Metals Task Team. This task team involves all relevant stakeholders e.g. SAPS, Eskom, Telkom, Spoornet,

Metrorail, Local Government and Business. This initiative is being led by government and in light of this is chaired by a high ranking Police Official. The idea behind the NFMTT is to involve all stakeholders in a concerted effort to stamp out the plague of metals theft (specifically copper) by focusing on the markets both internal and export. Other vital stakeholders involved in this initiative include the Asset Forfeiture Unit (AFU), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) International Trade Administration Commission (ITAC), the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and the South African Revenue Services (SARS). The success of the NFMTT is based on effective collaboration and cooperation. Coupled with this is the ability to operationalise strategic decisions made at this level. In theory the NFMTT initiative should be effective and therefore an in-depth evaluation into the effectiveness of this initiative should be considered as such might identify certain successes, pitfalls, recommendations, etc.

Transport Minister S'bu Ndebele has taken a serious step in the fight against copper cable theft in particular, as he announced in local news that "consideration to combat copper cable theft include the revival of a committee consisting of Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (Prasa) operational security, the South African Railway Police and other stakeholders."^{xvi} This strategy speaks about the parastatal Prasa taking own pro-active responsibility for the fight against their cable thieves as he further describes that "since 2007, there have been 51 cases of overhead cable theft and 737 of signal cable." Prasa's further move is to now start moving away from copper cable to optic fibre cabling in order to discourage would-be-thieves.

Crime Reporting

Most prevention stakeholders implemented crime report toll free numbers e.g. Telkom 0800 000, City of Cape Town 0800 222 771, etc. in order to allow community members to report suspicious activities or blow the whistle on one or more Izinyoka (Cable thief). The important factor here is that all information received through these lines be followed up meticulously. It seems that role-players involved here do their utmost best in ensuring such, but lack of resources provides serious time delays in response and hampers in fulfilling this goal. This in turn Coupled with toll-free numbers countries like the USA add rewards for information. The largest reward identified was \$25000 from Bonneville Power Administration for information leading to a positive arrest and conviction. The typical reward in America offered in this regard is \$1000^{xvii}.

Re-classification of Copper

What is called a "drastic step to halt copper theft" the Minister for Public Enterprises announced that there is now a serious consideration for declaring copper a precious metal^{xviii}. Some reasons mentioned for the consideration of this move is issues such as Transnet and Eskom's combined losses due to copper theft increasing with 38.1% in 2008/09 and replacement costs in the same year with up with 57.4%. These are figures for serious concern if we consider Transnet and Eskom spend a combined amount of nearly R70 million replacing stolen/damaged cable in 2009. However, designating copper would not be that simple due to the following reasons: "designating copper as a precious metal would mean that individuals seeking to trade in copper would require permits and authorisation from the South African Diamond and Precious Metals Regulator."

This step is said to make it seem only more difficult to trade in copper but in reality there are other factors also playing a role e.g. the Precious Metals Act prohibits one from selling precious metals in a

“raw” form. The challenge with this prohibition is that stolen copper cable is not a raw product but in effect a finished product. These are some of the challenges still to be discussed by the forum seeking re-classification of copper.

Effectiveness of Strategies/Policies

Without the ability to remove the black market trading of copper the new Act faces a serious challenge in being effective. The US Congress in considering the Copper Theft Prevention Act of 2008 found that “theft is on the rise due primarily because of the lack of pressure on the scrap and salvage yards that pay for copper and other precious metal without asking questions about where the material came from.”^{xix} In light of this, strategies to close down the market would be ineffective unless this forms part of the strategy. In the not-too-distant past the Democratic Alliance (DA) called for the following nine steps to be considered in fighting copper theft^{xx}:

- Empower the Non-Ferrous Theft Combating Committee (NFTCC)
- Accurate tracking of crime information
- Specialised training of judicial officials
- Increased export control
- Marking of cables
- Creating a specialised SAPS Unit
- Establishing a reward hotline
- Eradicate the backlog of dealer licenses

From these points mentioned the following has been found:

The NFTCC operates effectively in being a forum to identify trends, give strategic guidance and coordinate operations. The SAPS is still not making use of a specific crime code for copper theft and that still makes it a serious challenge for the SAPS to determine accurate statistics on copper theft. Specialised training of judicial officers is not felt at ground level as the experience is that too many cases are either withdrawn too easily or prosecuted ineffectively by judicial officers. The NFTCC partner, Business Against Crime (BAC) is still in process of investigating the issue of increased export control. Marking of cables is looked into, but still remains a challenge as will be discussed later.

With the previous Head of Police (Jackie Selebi) wanting detectives to be more generalists instead of specialists for reasons given at the time, the chances of creating a specialised unit in the SAPS seems bleak. Local government, in specific City of Cape Town has initiated such a step by establishing a specialised Cable Theft Unit, later called Metals Theft Unit, more colloquially known as the Copperheads. The challenge with this Unit is lack of official Police powers under the Second Hand Goods Act. In certain cases stakeholders already implement a reward for information, but no official reward hotline is currently in place with stakeholders. The backlog of dealer licenses lies in the hands of the SAP Second Hand Goods Division and no information on progress is available. Effectiveness of

the New Act is still to be determined as the Act is currently still in implementation phase. It is important.

International practices in developing and developed countries

Reduction of Copper value

Strategies employed in developing countries include intelligence through registered informers and a tip-off system that rewards informants \$1000 for positive information in the US. In order to curb copper theft US companies like American Electric Power replaced all-copper grounds with ones consisting of copper wound around galvanized metal known as copper weld^{xxi}. The idea behind this is that copper-weld is worth less than pure copper and to unwind the copper from the cheap metal rod is very time consuming. Another way to reduce the theft of copper being investigated in developing countries is the coating of copper with aluminium. The idea behind this is that the coating would reduce the value of the copper for sale purposes, indirectly discouraging copper thieves to make the effort. However, thieves cannot always tell that it is e.g. copper-weld when they steal it, so it may not deter the damage done in this regard.

Money Exchange

Some developed countries implemented a practice of not paying out cash for copper at scrap dealers. Scrap Dealers in this regard are told to pay individuals out per cheque instead of cash and some go as far as only making payment into a seller's bank account.^{xxii} The Second Hand Goods Act provides for a tag-and-hold program (seven day holding period) that is similar to that of developed countries however, without consistent monitoring, this program lose its effectiveness.

Cable Protection

A practice at current utilised in developed countries and currently being considered in developing countries is that of microscopic signatures on cable. Here we are referring to nanotechnology. This practice is however very expensive and it has limited application. Added to this is the fact that this is a responsive/reactive instead of proactive exercise. The fact that you try to identify the cable when already chopped up into pieces means that damage is already severe. As it is most of the time thorny to predict the strike point of copper thieves developed and developing countries make use of alarms placed on sensitive cable routes in order to alarm them concerning tampering. This initiative however is an expensive and challenging method as so many uncontrolled factors is to be considered e.g. response time, connectivity, cost, etc.

Alternative Lighting

Developing countries like South Africa has opted for installing high mast lightning at a cost of R150 000 per pole^{xxiii} set in certain areas as opposed to conventional street lights as the former is more vandal proof.

Legislation

As mentioned earlier Zimbabwe has made amendments to its Electricity Act in 2007 that puts the statutory maximum sentence for violating the act by committing copper cable theft at 10 years. One such sentence has been handed down in July of 2009 when two cable thieves were found guilty after

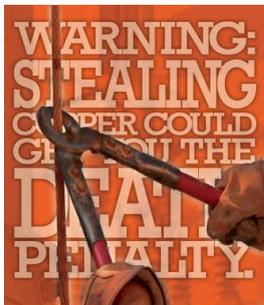
being caught in a special operation and subsequently sentenced. Governments in developed countries have passed laws prohibiting certain transactions e.g. buying from someone who has been convicted of theft. When this law was legislated in Macon USA, copper theft dropped by 42%^{xxiv}. South Bend, Indiana also passed successful legislation (copper theft showed steady decrease) that required scrap dealers to take thumbprints^{xxv} of ALL sellers. Some developing countries like Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, etc. went even further in order to curb cable theft as it was seen as tremendously serious to their countries' survival. In these countries a ban was placed on all exports of scrap metal. In some instances this led to an estimate 800 000^{xxvi} jobs that was lost in Kenya. Such moves reveal the seriousness of copper cable theft. Sierra Leone lifted this ban in 2008.

Specialist Units

States plagued by metals theft in developing countries has established specialised metals theft units e.g. Dallas Police Metal Theft Unit, Fort Worth Police (Texas) Metal Theft Unit, Oregon Joint Metals Theft Task Force, Houston Police Metal Theft Unit, and Phoenix Police (Arizona) Metals Theft Unit^{xxvii}. Where places where specialist units were established there was a decrease in instances. The reason for this is that a focused approach almost always bears more success than a generalist approach. In comparison to other countries, the South African Police disbanded the previous Copper Theft Unit that was established and at current there is no specialised approach to this plaque other than through the efforts of the Non-Ferrous Metals Task Team that seek to find joint strategies to curb copper theft in SA. The Local Government in Cape Town has taken a leaf from the international practice route by establishing the Metals Theft Unit, which has in turn showed good success in that it was said to reduce expenses in Cape Town from R22 million to R500 000 from its inception^{xxviii}.

Awareness

Awareness campaigns that ensure all roleplayers understand the seriousness of the plaque has been introduced in developed countries and this bears reference as there is an understanding of the epidemic in all spheres of stakeholder and most are trying to work toward doing their part. Communities are to take responsibility also in this regard to protect their infrastructure. Awareness should be focused here to the effect that neighbourhood watches are also gearing behind this cause.



Awareness under Scrap metal dealers is also crucial in this regard. In developed countries Dealership Associations are encouraged to develop working relationships with law enforcement agencies; identify sellers comprehensively for locating purposes; fully track all transactions; refuse purchasing certain types of materials without letter of authorization and; train of receivers of goods in identifying suspicious transactions.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In a way, the fight against copper theft seems like it is becoming somewhat of a conundrum. With copper cable theft costing the South African economy nearly R5 billion per year^{xxix}, it is a matter of serious concern. Ben Coetzee of ISS calls it "a clear and present danger to the national infrastructure and economic welfare of South Africa and its Citizens."^{xxx} We are dealing here with basic economics: Demand for metal is long and supply is short. Buyers need metal and peddlers need money (irrespective of usage) and where these two facts intersect we have metals theft. It is important that

our prevention plans be geared toward finding sustainable solutions. Further, it is important that all policies and strategies be subjected to official review in order to determine effectiveness and or give guidance on.

Implementing Safety Policies

With regards to blending technology and strategy Leigh Yorke-Smith says it best when she says “Statistics and research have revealed that it is all very well spending money on state-of-the-art high tech security solutions, but this alone cannot solve the problem; it needs to be matched by capable management and a security policy. Merely outsourcing security detail is not adequate...”^{xxxix} It is important that utilities, parastatals and developers alike need to take self-responsibility in formulating and implementing a security policy that has outsourcing as only a means to an end and not the end itself. Experience has shown that one needs to take own responsibility for own security. This is evident in even classic situations like armed response for your place of residence. Such safety policies to be developed should to incorporate issues like cable devaluing strategies e.g. copper-weld, etc.

Closing Markets for Stolen Goods

Above looking into devising ways to protect their metal all stakeholders should contribute to the systems that are being developed to disrupt the “black market” for metal theft. It should be understood that the indirect cost of cable theft includes loss of income, disruption of essential services, labour cost to repair and of course prevention and security costs. The question still remains: Can scrapyards be the place to look for both the problem and the potential solution? The challenge remains: cable is cable, scrap metal is scrap metal, it means that in some instances we are going to be forced to go by the character of the person coming in although even this is not even a full proof plan. Although it is difficult to identify any other market a common cable thief can access, one should be careful in stereotyping the industry. Previous experience has proven that thieves can be very ingenious in disposing of stolen goods e.g. holding a “legal” garage sale to dispose of stolen house breaking goods, etc. Perpetrators can therefore seek to go circumvent scrap dealers in getting rid of their stolen goods however this scenario does not sound very plausible in this specific scenario. The NFMSTT could be instrumental in devising ways to better regulate export control.

Enhance Legislation

Policing agencies should take a leaf from Zimbabwe and focus on more special (sting) operations. Mvelase (Acting Telkom Executive) seem to be correct in deducing that the current perception out there is that cable theft is a “victimless” crime^{xxxix}, referring to the slow rate of convictions and the high rate of repeat offenders. It is clear that the type of sentences handed down in SA for crimes like copper theft is no deterrent for such crimes to be committed. In light of this the judiciary should be guided through the devastating effects of copper theft so as to better understand the epidemic we are faced with. Further, providing for a specific contravention in terms of the Electricity Act will surely aid the judiciary in handing down stiffer sentences that might successfully act as an actual deterrent.

The USA drew a similar conclusion when they found that “copper theft rarely results in jail time^{xxxix}”. The study found that only a very small percentage of people who steal copper are caught and this in turn leads to continued copper theft. To add insult-to-injury the study further found that only a small percentage of those caught are actually successfully convicted and those convicted are usually placed on probation and serve no jail time or get fined and serve little jail time.

Ensure Public Support

We need to win public support through ensuring our awareness campaigns are geared to position metals theft as a public safety issue. It is important to note, according to Mvelase, that “resources that could have been used to expand the infrastructure have to be used to repair damaged existing services, resulting in the continued deprivation of basic services to outlying areas.”^{xxxiv} If the public understand this predicament there is much hope that they will support crime fighting initiatives more profusely.

Enhance In-House Security

Internal security processes is pivotal in the fight against copper theft as a good number of such happen “in house” as well. Experience has shown that cable theft is too accurate at times to be committed by perpetrators without the necessary in-house information to do so. Awareness should thus also be geared to in-house staff as well.

Partnerships

The NFMTT is one such major partnership initiative that should be well nurtured. Care should be taken that strategic decisions at this level are meticulously implemented at ground level. Notwithstanding the partnership that the NFMTT seeks to maintain, partnerships amongst LEA Agencies, Utilities and Research Institutions be also geared up as this could be very rewarding exercise for all parties involved.

Expand on Resources & Implement Reward Scheme

An increase in resources would inadvertently lead to a reduction in response time that is a crucial factor in running a crime report line. As an example here, more manpower and vehicles could lead to more personnel covering smaller areas for much quicker response to incidences as well as prevention patrols. The implementation of a reward scheme has been proven successful in countries like the USA, and should be considered for implementation by Utilities and Agencies alike in South Africa. An official informant reward policy would surely aid positively in sourcing of official informants as it is clear that copper thieves need effective intelligence gathering to be stopped.

Reasonable-man-Test

Although it is not fair to “judge” people on how they look and where they stay, it is important to not feel intimidated in applying the reasonable man test. While anyone has the right to sell scrap, dealers should start asking questions like: is it reasonable for someone who is unemployed and staying in a metal theft hotspot area to bring in copper every other week? Such suspicious transactions need to be reported immediately to the relevant authorities.

Create Specialist Units & Crime Codes

As the establishment of specialist units in countries like the USA and even our own City of Cape Town has proven successful, it is important that South African Law Enforcement Agencies should strongly consider this step. The SAPS should reinstitute the Specialist Cable Theft Unit and Local Government Agencies should take a leaf from Cape Town and establish specialist metals theft units in order to aid their utilities in this fight. An establishment of a specific crime code for copper theft would assist in the determining of actual cost of crime and statistical data.

Powers to Police

The powers of the police in the current Act is not enough to stop channeling of stolen goods through the industry. To stop it requires a more comprehensive approach which should include additions to legislation as well. An example to be made here is that the law should state that used goods dealers should be obligated to check with police if goods are stolen. This could be done through maybe a form been taken to the police with the particulars of the goods and the police to “clear” (with consulting utilities & developers) these goods. This would be easy to do if stolen goods are promptly reported and circulated. Further, the seven day waiting period could rather be called a clearance period. The seller than has seven days to clear the goods with the police, only after which he can be paid out. Regular inspections are necessary to create awareness that the police are actively fighting this battle and the Police should apply the Act more profusely if they want to achieve more. These same powers should also be delegated down to Local Government Enforcers.

Dealer Strategies

All dealers should apply the reasonable-man-test profusely. Dealers should educate their customers toward their “no stolen goods” policies. They should never buy stolen goods and this would be the message they sent to would-be stolen goods sellers. Dealers should all adopt a zero tolerance policy.

In an attempt to clamp down on the sale of stolen goods scrap dealers have come up with interesting strategies as already discussed in detail above. SA dealers should be informed of such and encouraged to utilise some in order to support the fight against this crime. Dealers should also be more prone in providing information to the police. The industry can also get involved by training counter buyers on suspicious transactions and individuals.

Closing Statement

Copper Cable Theft can only be beaten through a collaborative approach!

ⁱ Berinato, S. 2007. *Red Gold Rush - The Copper Theft Epidemic*, Available at <http://www.csoonline.com/article/print/221225> (Accessed on 08/06/2010)

ⁱⁱ Justus, C. 2010. *City continues to battle street light cable*. Media Release, City of Cape Town. February 2010

ⁱⁱⁱ Berinato, S. 2007. *Red Gold Rush - The Copper Theft Epidemic*, Available at <http://www.csoonline.com/article/print/221225> (Accessed on 08/06/2010)

^{iv} McKinnon, J. 2010. *Copper prices make electric substations prime targets*. Available at <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/10180/1068967-28.stm?cmpid=business.xml> (Accessed 8/07/2010)

^v Berinato, S. 2007. *Red Gold Rush - The Copper Theft Epidemic*, Available at <http://www.csoonline.com/article/print/221225> (Accessed on 08/06/2010)

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