

Briefing note from the Northern Ireland Utilities Working Group on Metal Theft to the Northern Ireland Assembly – The Committee for the Environment

4th December 2015

About the Northern Ireland Utilities Working Group

The Northern Ireland Utilities Working Group on Metal Theft has been working together for the past five years to provide a co-ordinated response to the issue of metal theft. Members include BT, NIE Networks, NI Water, Translink and Transport NI (Road Services).

The main reasons for the utility organisations working together against metal theft are due to the following:

- disruption to utility services with serious consequences to our vulnerable residents, emergency services, hospitals, schools and the economy at large;
- safety to the general public, employees and the perpetrators of metal theft themselves;
- possible contamination to the environment from burnt wires, discharge of chemicals and waste; and
- financial cost to replace and make good the stolen plant and equipment.

The impact of metal theft on our community and colleagues

Some of the types of metal theft affecting our utility services and its implications to the community and employees are as follow:

NI Water

- Manhole covers are easy target for metal theft perpetrators. In a street in Newry manhole covers were stolen every time they were replaced. This posed a significant danger to the students at the nearby primary school and the vehicles travelling on that road. It was eventually stopped when police increased their surveillance in that area;
- Theft of earthing tape / lightning protection from pumping stations and communication masts was a common occurrence. It places our employees and contractors at risk of lightning strikes and electrocution;
- Cable theft and damaged to our communications links could result in telemetry signals not being sent resulting in drinking water failures and storm water overflows not being detected;
- Thieves broke into our water and wastewater processing plant and stole metal parts of plants causing systems to shut down and putting our employees at risk and unprocessed waste being discharged into the river;
- In one case, a wastewater processing unit which required a heavy duty lifting machine to transport it onto a lorry was stolen from one of our sites;
- Several gates to our water and wastewater pumping stations were stolen putting the public at risk. Perpetrators would often steal diesel and other tools as well;
- One of our disused premises was targeted several times in Lisburn and part of the building was set on fire. Eventually, the police were able to arrest five thieves but regrettably only minimal punishment was given due to lack of legislation in relation to metal theft.

NIE Networks

- Two incidents where oil has been drained from a transformer in order to remove copper and requiring an environmental clean up.
- Forty recorded incidents where electricity poles have been cut down and copper line stolen. These incidents have resulted in over 25km of copper line being stolen. However, more importantly as majority of these incidents tend to take place in rural areas there is a greater impact on the members of the community living in these areas, due in part to the isolation, and the fact these incidents tend to take place at night. The elderly and vulnerable have been directly affected and incidents have also affected supply to a place of worship in the Moneymore area, a primary school in Garvagh where there was an outage whilst a damaged pole in an adjacent car park was replaced. In two incidents overhead lines remained live after being cut down and in one case overhead lines were left hanging in the road and this was the direct cause of a road traffic accident. The farming community has also been directly affected as on three occasions both dairy and cattle farms have had to deal with issues associated with the loss of supply.
- Twenty-two substations where copper earth has been stolen leaving these substation sites in a dangerous condition not only exposing NIE Networks' staff to a risk of serious injury or worse but also members of the public as some of these sites have been in urban locations close to recreational areas used by the public.
- Theft of cable from construction sites, including social housing development sites.

Translink

Metal thieves are becoming more daring as they move from stealing cable to attempting to remove actual railway line. An attempt was discovered on the branch line between Lisburn and Antrim where 100 clips (holding 40 metres of track) had been dislodged in preparation for the removal of track.

Although this branch line is no longer in commission for scheduled passenger service trains it can be used in emergencies if the normal routes from Antrim or Lisburn were obstructed. It is also frequently used for driver training. If this incident had not been discovered by a trackwalker then there would have been potential for a train derailment.

TransportNI (Road Services)

- TransportNI Street Lighting had incurred stolen cables from their underground network. The impact of which has caused danger both to the public and employees from exposed live electrical cables resulting in housing developments and roads left in darkness. The replacement of these network cables had cost approximately £350,000. The effect of these losses meant that whole communities have had no street lighting. This had given rise to anti-social behaviour and residents' fear of being burgled;
- There had been many incidents of this type of theft such as Polly's Brae road in Largy, Limavady. This is a housing development of approximately 40 homes, most of which have elderly residents. This development was left in darkness and it took a considerable time to re-establish lighting;

- Another example of the effect of theft from the cable network was at Dunloy Crossroads on the A26 Coleraine to Ballymena road. This crossroads had a major upgrading including street lighting. This was to reduce the risk of road traffic accidents of which there had been a number including a fatal accident. The underground cable was subsequently stolen leaving the crossroads in darkness giving rise to the risk of the possibility of more fatalities; and
- The removal of cable from street lighting systems will also have an impact on the environment. To remove the copper requires burning of the cable which will pollute the atmosphere with toxic chemicals given off by the cable insulation.

BT (Examples from Northern Ireland and Great Britain)

- Phone lines and broadband connections lost after telephone cables were stolen resulting in police having to provide extra patrols in the area;
- Patients were unable to make contact with health centre for nearly three weeks after cable was stolen;
- Pensioners were unable to collect their benefits and businesses were crippled after thieves stole telephone wire;
- Coastguard communications were knocked out after thieves stole cable, cutting out aerial signals and putting lives at risk. Volunteers were drafted in by HM Coastguard during the early hours to sit in stone buildings along the coast with a bank of radios listening for calls;
- Thief caught trying to steal back-up line cable for an Air Traffic Control and Police radios that could have put the public in serious danger;
- Homes and businesses were affected by cable theft which resulted in the inability to make electronic payments and even the pay point could not be operated thus affecting cash withdrawal; and
- Companies at a business park had to shut down when 350 metres cabling were stolen as all channels of communication were affected.

Tackling metal theft in Northern Ireland

The Joint Utilities Group has been lobbying to tighten legislation for scrap metal dealers for a number of years and taking action to tackle metal theft:-

1. Additional measures put in place to prevent or deter metal theft from taking place in the first instance (such as the physical protection or securing of valuable metals);
2. Support for the NIEA and the PSNI to gather intelligence on incidents of metal theft (such as the Crimestoppers campaign and share learning on recent crimes) and to put in place a voluntary code of conduct for scrap metal dealers.

However, the Group still believes there is a need for legislation in Northern Ireland to close down markets for illegal scrap metal thereby deterring the crime and protecting the safety of the general public.

This type of legislation has proved successful in England and Wales. Following its introduction crime figures show a marked reduction of the crime in England and Wales and an increase of the crime in Scotland. We believe this demonstrates the transitory nature of this crime.


The Scottish Parliament has since introduced similar legislation and that the Republic of Ireland has also introduced the 'Waste Management (Facility Permit and Registration)

Regulation 2014', which we were given to understand that it incorporates metal theft. We remain concerned that the lack of legislation in Northern Ireland will eventually lead to an increase in metal theft here.

We are therefore pleased to offer our support to the proposed Private Members Bill being brought forward by Roy Beggs MLA. If this Bill is approved, increased traceability will exist of those who have sold scrap metal to dealers and increased powers of access will be given to police. Scrap Metal Dealers will be required to keep records of transactions along with records of the identification of the seller. This proposed legislation will significantly help to protect the resident of Northern Ireland from perpetrators of metal theft and improve the health and safety of our colleagues.

Note:

Please find attached the proposed presentation to the Committee scheduled for the 10th December 2015.






Northern Ireland Utilities Working Group on Metal Theft
 Presentation for
 The Committee for the Environment
 Thursday 10th December 2015

Presentation by

- George Ong, Chief Risk Officer, NI Water
- Paul Irving, Land and Property Security Officer, NIE Networks
- Clive Bradberry, Infrastructure Executive, Translink
- Eddie Lynn, Asst. Lighting Engineer, TransportNI



northern ireland water

Consequences to NIW

- Customer Service Impact - Possible interruptions to the supply of drinking water;
- Environmental Impact - increased risk of pollution incident due to stolen parts resulting in untreated wastewater being discharged into rivers.






northern ireland water

Consequences to NIW


- Health & Safety risks to the public and our employees and contractors e.g. danger of falling down exposed manholes;
- Security concerns – metal gates stolen, danger to the public
- Economic costs – costs associated with actual loss of metal is about £140k from Aug 2010 to current with an additional £130k on protective measures and repairs.





northern ireland water

Items NIW have lost

- Manhole / hydrant covers
- Copper lightning tape / earthing strips from radio masts
- Copper piping & water tanks from derelict buildings
- Stainless steel covers and pipe fittings
- Palisade fencing panels
- Electrical cable
- Roofing Lead
- Huber Inlet Screen used to filter sewerage







Metal Theft Impact

- Safety risk to those involved in criminal activity
- Safety risk to members of the public and NIE Networks' employees
- Loss of supply to customers – homes, hospitals, schools and businesses
- Damage to infrastructure
- Costs of repair
- Environmental – Release of oil

nienetworks.co.uk

Metal Theft Impact

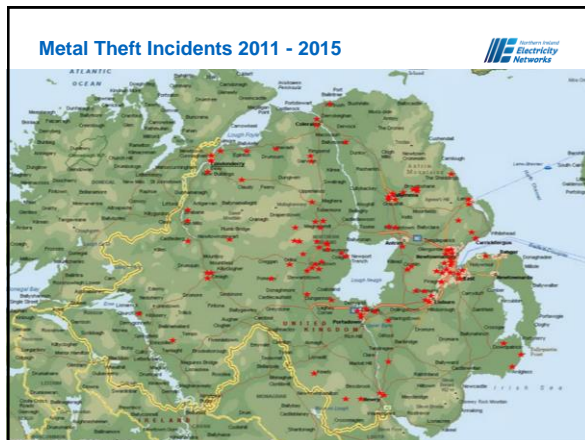
St Mathias' Church

Coast Road Glenarm

Lisburn Main Substation

Faldler Mill Substation

nielnetworks.co.uk



Recent attempt to steal railway line on disused branch line near Lisburn - no longer used for customers but regularly used for training purposes - this posed serious risk of loss of life and serious injury through possible train derailment.

Theft of rail from Galgorm crossing required specialised equipment including cutting gear and mini digger - this operation took over 6 hours to complete.

TransportNI Street Lighting had incurred stolen cables from their underground network. The impact of which has caused danger both to the public and employees from exposed live electrical cables resulting in housing developments and roads left in darkness.

Cable Theft is Perceived as a Low Risk, High Reward Crime

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| Cables Easily Attainable with Basic Cutting Equipment | Significant Collateral Damage to our Network | Easy to Dispose of Stolen Cable in Exchange for Cash |
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Societal Impact of Telecoms Cable Theft

Essential services

- 999
- Police Airwaves
- Defence
- Hospitals
- Air Traffic Control
- Water Control
- National Grid/Power Companies
- Prisons

Business

- Telephony
- Broadband
- PDQ Machines
- Mobile Phones
- Banking
- ATM
- CCTV
- Local and Wide Area Networks

Community Impact

- Schools
- Libraries
- Burglar Alarms
- Telephony
- Broadband
- TV
- Community/Council CCTV
- Offender Tagging

