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Copper Theft: Gain a Buck, Lose a Life

Impacts from illegal activity are far-reaching

West Point, NE –Copper theft has reached an epidemic level that is not only affecting the United States, but is international and creating immense global havoc. According to the U.S. Department of Energy the theft of copper costs the national economy around \$1 billion per year. The increase in copper theft has disrupted the flow of electricity, created electrical hazards, slowed down construction projects, and knocked out irrigation networks across the United States.

Additionally, when thieves cut locks or chain link fencing surrounding an electric substation they leave a highly dangerous area exposed for inquisitive children and animals.

“Stealing material from an electric substation or utility pole can cause not only serious injuries and death, but extensive outages, fires and explosions – consequences that impact innocent people,” said Randy Dickerson, Cuming County Public Power District (CCPPD) Operations Manager. “The minimum damage that can occur is an outage, which may affect thousands of individuals.”

CCPPD was affected just recently by copper theft. Brian Throener, CCPPD lineman on call, was notified after work hours on Thursday, March 3, 2011. It was around 11pm that a few customers in the area had called because they were out of power. Brian headed to an abandoned farm just east of Snyder. He searched the line and found a copper ground wire on one of the poles had been cut. In the attempt to steal the wire, it got tangled into the power line and caused the power outage. It could have resulted in serious injury or their life.

Deaths and damages related to copper theft are completely unnecessary and could happen anywhere. “People must be aware of this kind of theft and that tampering with electric power facilities can result in extremely dangerous situations,” Dickerson said. “Always alert your utility provider when you see or suspect suspicious activity.”

Cuming County Public Power District offers these tips to help safeguard against electrical dangers and prevent copper theft:

- Never enter or touch equipment inside a substation; stay away from power lines and anything touching a power line.

- If you notice anything unusual with electric facilities, such as an open substation gate, open equipment, hanging wire, etc. contact your electric utility immediately.
- If you see anyone around electric substations or electric facilities other than utility personnel or contractors, call the police.
- Install motion-sensor lights on the outside of your house and business to deter possible thieves.
- Store tools and wire cutters in a secure location, and never leave them out while away.
- If you work in construction, do not leave any wires unattended or leave loose wire at the job site, especially overnight. Consider hiring a night security guard.
- Help spread the word about the deadly consequences that can result from trying to steal copper.

Copper theft is not harmless. Dealing with any metal and electricity is a dangerous combination, especially when it is done without permission or training. Copper theft places the thief and others in danger.

“People who think stealing electric wire is a quick way to earn some easy money should think again,” said Dickerson. “The value of metal is not worth losing a life.”

For more information call CCPPD at 402-372-2463 or visit: www.ccppd.com.

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