Metal Thefts
A Nationwide Epidemic

Presented by
Winston-Salem Police Department
Crime Prevention Unit
Objectives

• Provide a Definition for Metal Thefts
• Explain Why Metal Thefts are on the Rise
• Identify the Most Popular Metals being Stolen
• Discuss How Certain Metals are being Stolen
• List Some Winston-Salem Crime Statistics
• Discuss Related Criminal Statutes
• List Ways Citizens Can Help
What Are Metal Thefts?

• Metal Thefts involves the larceny of items for their value of essential metals.
• Metals, such as copper, aluminum and steel are then extracted from the stolen items, usually at scrap yards, and then sold to factories to build new products.
Classifications of Metals

The Metal Scrap Industry Generally Classifies Metals into Two Categories

- **Ferrous** (containing iron/magnetic)
  - Iron
  - Steel
  - Iron Alloys

- **Non-Ferrous** (no iron/non-magnetic)
  - Copper
  - Aluminum
  - Lead

The Non-Ferrous Metals tend to be the Primary Targets for Thieves
Why Metal Thefts Are On The Rise?

• A great demand for copper, platinum, aluminum and other non-ferrous metals from developing nations, such as China, India, South Africa and South Korea has caused near-record prices for these metals.

• The high demand for these metals has led to an increase of thefts of common items that in better economic times would have normally been overlooked.
In 2000, copper sold for about $0.80 lb. but in 2008 it rose to over $4.00 lb. The current price of copper is now around $4.20 lb.
Popular Metals Being Stolen

• Other metals, such as aluminum, steel and platinum had a huge increase in value in the recent past but have recently dropped, where copper hasn’t. It still remains very valuable.
• Common items containing various metals are diligently being sought after by thieves who can make some quick cash by selling the items at local scrap yards.
• Platinum, Rhodium and Palladium can be found in catalytic converters in automobiles.

• Copper can be found in commercial and residential plumbing and electrical wiring and in commercial and residential air conditioning units.

• Aluminum can be found in commercial and residential siding and guttering.
Popular Metals Being Stolen Continued

- Stainless Steel and Cast Iron can be found at businesses and commercial establishments.
- Brass and Bronze can be found in plaques, statues and other items at cemeteries and memorials.
The Cost of Metal Thefts

- The City of Winston-Salem is experiencing an increase in metal thefts just like other cities and towns across the Nation. The prime targets for these criminals are buildings under construction, vacant businesses and houses, power substations and even cell phone towers. The criminals are stripping businesses and houses of their copper pipes and copper wiring and they’re dismantling air conditioning units of their copper coils or just removing the air conditioning units all together. Each isolated theft might only profit the criminal a few hundred dollars but the damages incurred are costing the businesses and homes owners thousands.
Items Being Stolen For Their Essential Metals
Ways Certain Metals Are Stolen

• Some items are being taken from unsecured areas of businesses or from home owners properties without any actual breaking and/or entering occurring.
  – This would be those situations where the criminal is able to walk onto the business or residential property without having to deal with any security measures, such as fencing, gates, locks or alarms.
  – These larcenies could involve lawn decorations or furniture, siding, guttering and/or accessories removed from a home or building, unsecured building supplies from construction sites, copper pipes where there is access to the plumbing from a crawl space or access to the central air conditioning unit, and electrical wiring where there is access to the main power box.
Ways Certain Metals Are Stolen
Continued

• Other types of larcenies that don’t involve any breaking and/or entering on the part of the criminal would be larcenies from city streets, driveways, parking lots, cemeteries and utilities properties.
  – These larcenies could involve the criminal gaining access to automobiles for the catalytic converters, theft of manhole covers and/or other items from city streets that contain cast iron, steel or aluminum, items containing brass or bronze metals from cemeteries or memorials, and the theft of copper wiring from power substations, cell phone towers and other locations where tornado warning sirens have been installed.
Ways Certain Metals Are Stolen

Continued

• In many circumstances the criminal is only having to gain access through a gate, a lock or a fence to access many of the unsecured items mentioned.
Ways Certain Metals Are Stolen
Continued

• Many incidents that do involve the criminal breaking and entering into businesses, homes and/or other buildings largely involve those locations where security is minimal (no alarms, no video surveillance or poor lighting) and the buildings are unoccupied and/or vacant.
Crime Statistics

• **Winston-Salem Crime Statistics (Focusing on the 3 Major Problem Areas):**
  • There is some overlapping within the numbers listed for Copper thefts and AC thefts.
    – **Copper (Stolen or Attempted)**
      • 2007: 85 Incidents
      • 2008: 145 Incidents
      • 2009: 70 Incidents
      • 2010: 209 Incidents
      • 2011 (Through June): 221 Incidents
    – **Air Conditioning Units (Stolen or Attempted)**
      • 2007: 44 Incidents
      • 2008: 81 Incidents
      • 2009: 89 Incidents
      • 2010: 137 Incidents
      • 2011 (Through June): 136 Incidents
    – **Catalytic Converters (Stolen or Attempted)**
      • 2007: 12 Incidents
      • 2008: 107 Incidents
      • 2009: 8 Incidents
      • 2010: 82 Incidents
      • 2011 (Through June): 28 Incidents

As you can see by looking at the crime statistics, the City of Winston-Salem is dealing with an increase in metal thefts like many other cities in the United States.
Related & Involved Crimes

• Felonious Breaking and/or Entering into a Residence or Commercial Building
• Misdemeanor Breaking and/or Entering
• Larceny (Misdemeanor or Felony based on value of stolen items or how it was stolen)
• First Degree and Second Degree Trespassing
• Tampering with a Motor Vehicle and Larceny from a Motor Vehicle
• Malicious Injury to Personal Property or Real Property (Vandalism)
• Possession of Stolen Property (Misdemeanor or Felony based on value of stolen items)
Ways Citizens Can Help

• Preventative Measures:
  – Securing Items on your Property
    • Fasten down or bolt down what decorative items you’re able to.
    • Move more expensive decorations or furniture to the back yard where it may be more secure and out of site of the criminal.
  – Lighting and Maintenance of Property
    • Make sure property is well lit at night with good lighting and/or that there are motion sensor lights being used in the proper places.
    • Keep shrubs and bushes trimmed to no more than 3’ high and tree limbs to no lower than 6’ so there is good visibility on the property.
  – Fences or Other Devices
    • Make sure fences are well maintained and that locks and/or chains with locks are being used on gates.
    • Installing a steel mesh cage around your AC unit can provide added security for your air conditioning system. (See photos on next slide)
Products Available for Securing Air Conditioning Units
Ways Citizens Can Help Continued

• Preventative Measures Continued:
  – Alarm Systems
    • For those with alarm systems, you can have an alarm sensor installed to activate when your AC unit is tampered with.
    • You can also have a sensor placed on any crawl space door.
    • Simple self-installed audible alarm systems could be useful for some properties.
  – Video Surveillance Systems
    • Video surveillance systems can be extremely helpful in identifying and capturing criminals.
    • Make sure your video surveillance system is working properly.
Ways Citizens Can Help Continued

• Preventative Measures Continued:
  – Securing Doors and Windows
    • Make sure all doors and windows are secure with good locks and that dead bolts are being used on all exterior doors.
    • Make sure any crawl space door is secure with solid hinges, latches and locks.
    • Locks should also be used on all power boxes.
  – Securing Vehicles
    • Make sure you’re keeping your vehicle doors locked with no valuables visible inside.
    • Don’t park vehicles on the street at night if possible.
    • Make sure your vehicles are parked in well lit areas at night.
Reporting Suspicious Activity

- The fact is – the police cannot be everywhere at all times. A partnership between the community and the police is vital in keeping Winston-Salem safe. Crimes are frequently solved as a result of the community calling in and reporting suspicious activity or relaying information about unsolved crimes.
- Without cooperation and involvement from the community, crimes will go unreported and unsolved. Many crimes within our community could have been prevented if someone would have just reported the observed suspicious activities of the criminal(s) beforehand.
- Whenever you observe any suspicious activity, even though you may not be the only observer – Call the Police. Don’t rely on others to report what you’ve observed. The police would rather have multiple calls about one incident than none at all.
Reporting Suspicious Activity
Continued

• Suspicious Activity is something that catches your attention. It’s when you get the feeling that something isn’t right. It’s that gut feeling that someone is up to something. It’s that activity that isn’t normal in your neighborhood.

• It’s very important to report any suspicious activity as soon as you start observing it – Call immediately!

• Calling when you first begin observing the suspicious activity allows the police a greater chance of apprehending the criminal(s) in a timely manner, which tremendously increases the percentage that the criminal(s) will be convicted, and it prevents the criminal(s) from committing additional crimes if immediately apprehended.

• Stay alert for any suspicious activity within your neighborhood and call the police at the first sign of something happening.
Reporting Suspicious Activity
Continued

This vehicle is backed up behind a building to steal the copper coils from an air conditioning unit.

Why would this truck and trailer be driving through your neighborhood?
Suspicious Activity to Report

• Here are some things that you should be on the lookout for in your neighborhood.
  – Activities of persons who appear to be collecting metal in trucks, vans and/or trailers
  – Strangers – Unknown persons or vehicles in your neighborhood
  – Any activity around vacant homes or businesses
  – Persons or vehicles around homes when you know the owners are away
  – Persons walking behind homes or loitering in wooded areas or secluded areas near homes or businesses
  – Persons peering into vehicles or homes
  – Persons soliciting door to door
  – Suspicious work trucks or vans at residences
  – Unknown persons walking through neighborhoods with backpacks
  – Persons or vehicles around construction sites after hours
The Crime Prevention Unit

• Please contact the Winston-Salem Police Department’s Crime Prevention Unit if you have any questions or comments about this presentation – (336) 773-7835