

Puyallup Police Department

Problem Oriented Policing Unit



Metal Theft

The problem, the solution



The Problem



- Not a local issue, Nationwide issue
- Numerous constructions sites being burglarized
- Both commercial and residential
- Costly Crimes
- Very few if any witnesses
- Difficult to deploy resources to surveil

Commercial Burglaries



- Brand new spools of wire stolen
- Installed wiring ripped from walls
- Copper tubing taken (both installed and uninstalled)
- Installed tubing and wiring constitute the biggest loss; they must have it reinstalled in addition to repurchasing the materials



Commercial Thefts

- Baseball field lighting
 - Installed wiring taken from light poles
 - Installed wiring taken from underground conduit
 - Again, the biggest cost for this is labor
- Street Lights
 - installed wiring stolen



Commercial Thefts

- Air conditioning units
 - Theft of coil units containing copper and aluminum
 - Large dollar amount of theft due to complete replacing of unit necessary
 - Several took place during daylight hours
 - One business had four units destroyed: Price to fix - \$75,000.00
 - No witnesses to these crimes



Residential Burglaries

- Most of the time installed products taken
- Both wiring and copper tubing stolen, both installed and new supplies
- Few or no witnesses or evidence to these crimes



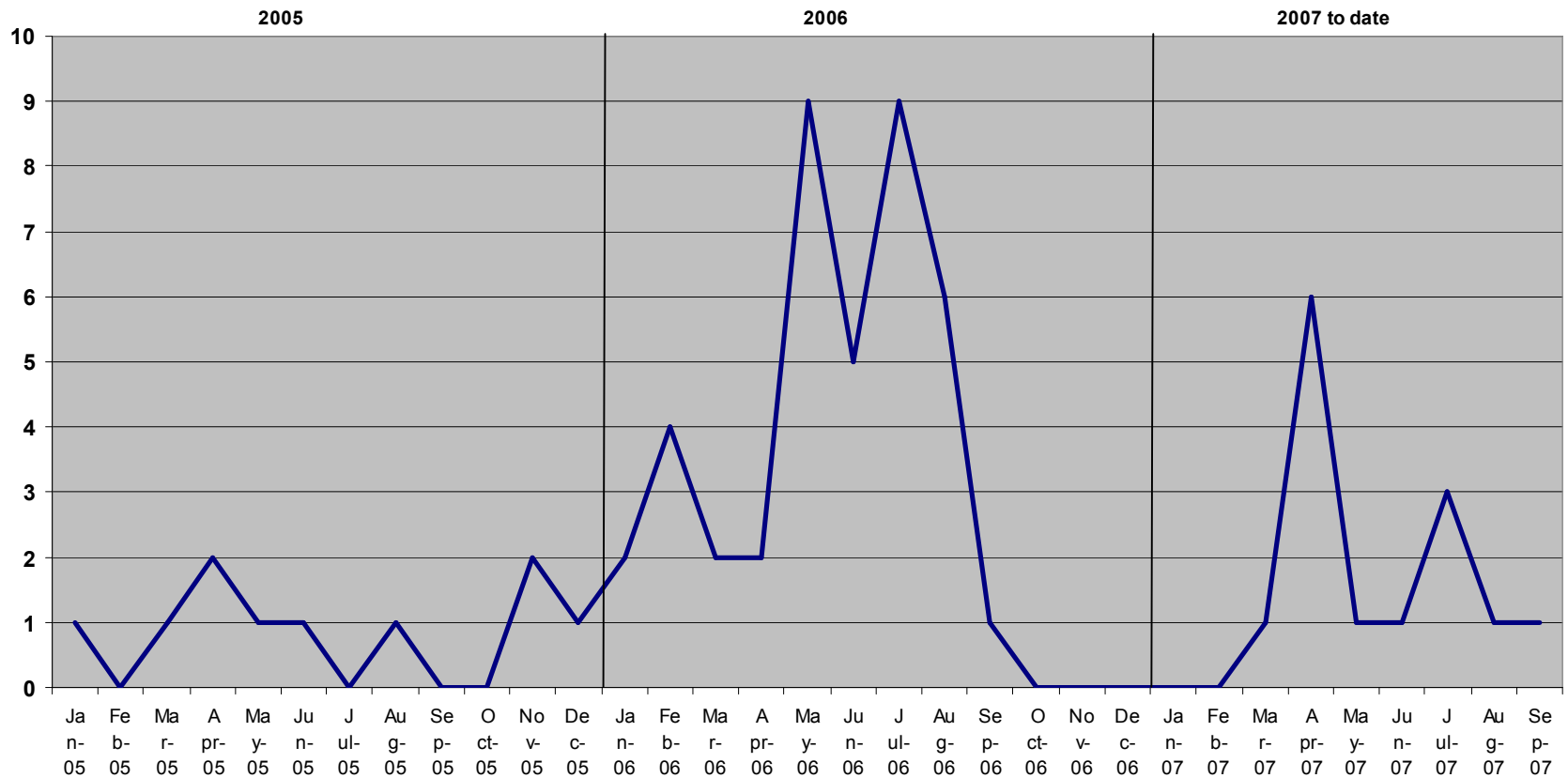
Analysis

- Why an upsurge in our state, county and city of these metal thefts?
- What was the reason behind these crimes?
- Where were the stolen items going?
- What could we do to curb the thefts?
- How could we empower our “victims” to help us help them?
- New laws needed for recyclers?

Statistics – Metal thefts

January 1, 2005 to September 19, 2007

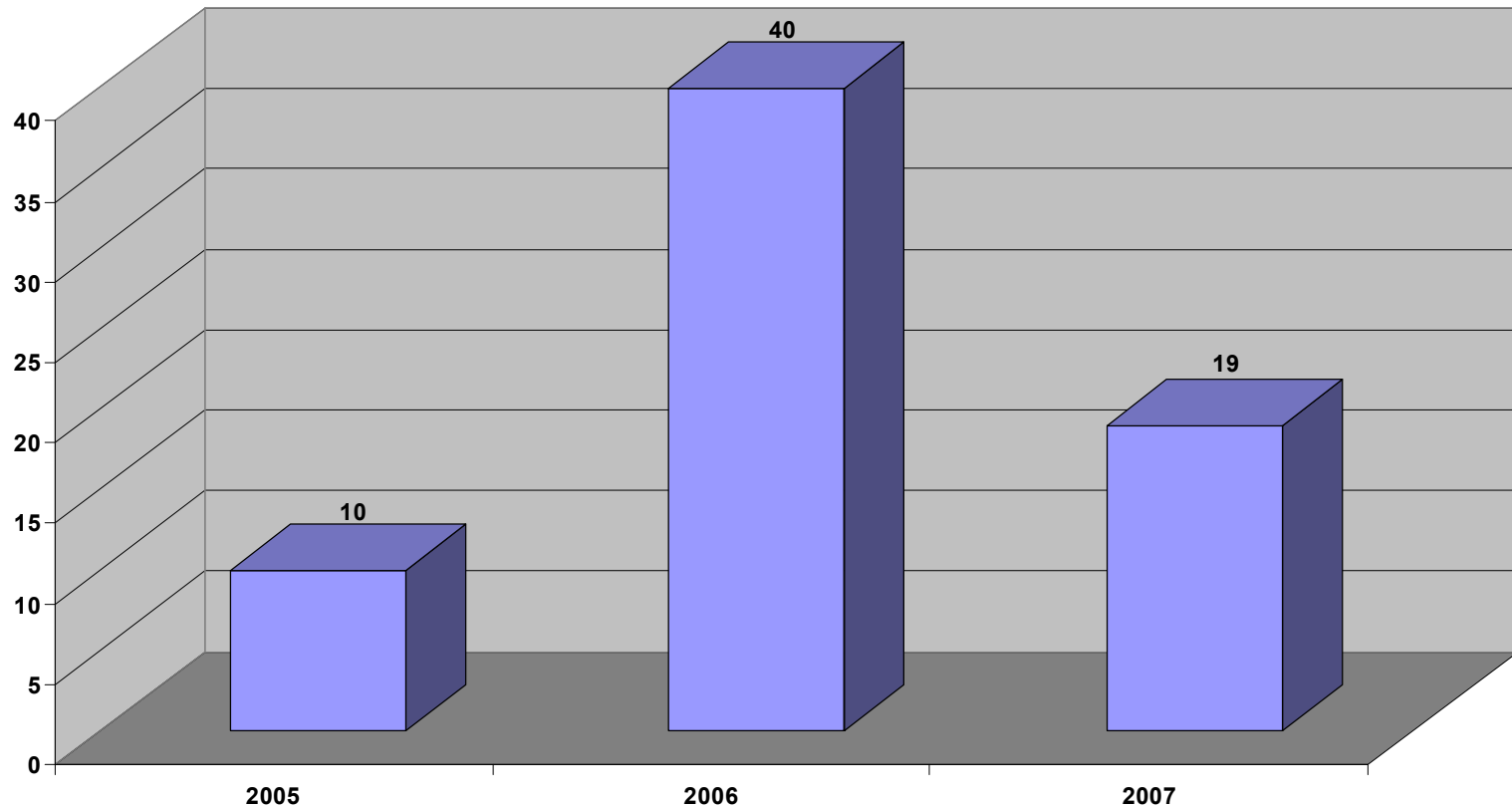
Copper Theft Incidents



Statistics – Metal thefts

January 1, 2005 to September 19, 2007

Copper Theft Incidents with projected data for 2007



Reason



- The rapid increase in the amount of metal thefts is attributed to a high demand for non ferrous metals overseas, especially copper.

Reason

- Decrease in methamphetamine labs attributed to a new law passed two years ago
- New requirement for stores to keep all pseudoephedrine products behind counters
- Requiring people who want to purchase these cold pills to produce valid ID and sign a log.



Reason

- Methamphetamine consumption was still an issue and without the availability of pseudoephedrine for the methamphetamine labs
- Users needed to buy the methamphetamine and needed cash.
- Metal theft was usually easier than burglarizing a house due to lack of security and the large amount of target product available.



Response

- Worked with local agencies to develop a “do not buy list” for recyclers
- Contact local county recyclers to explain the root problem and see what type of records were being kept
- Determine what we could do to help contractors deter criminal activity
- Mesa, Arizona intervention

Mesa, AZ Construction Theft Program

- Sgt. Bellmer requested help from our department Crime Analyst Lorri Ericson
- Through the IALEP (International Association of Law Enforcement Planners), Ericson made a request for information and learned of Mesa's program
- Due to high construction thefts, Mesa began having companies spray paint their property at jobsites
- Mesa's program had a 100% reduction in thefts almost IMMEDIATELY
- Bellmer worked with Mesa, AZ in applying the same plan to metal recycling and thefts.

Audience – anyone else tried to have sites mark metals?



Response (continued)

- We determined that the pawnshop laws could apply to recyclers - but it needed help
- Contacted local state representative Dawn Morrell in summer of 2006 – shared concerns of recent metal thefts
- Bill was drafted and introduced to combat the epidemic of metal theft January 2007
- Chief James and Sgt. Bellmer testified in a House hearing in Washington State
- New law was passed in May 2007

Elements of the new law

RCW Title 19

- Recyclers shall keep records for 1 year, including
 - Name, address, phone number, signature, and ID number of seller.
 - Date, time, location, and value of goods
 - Description of products sold and buyer's name
 - License number and description of vehicle
 - Signed declaration that the products are not stolen



Elements of the new law

RCW Title 19

- NO cash transactions over 30 dollars
 - Check is mailed to street address not less than ten days later
 - Also a crime if recycler makes multiple transactions to keep values under \$30



Elements of the new law

RCW Title 19

- Recyclers cannot accept:
 - Beer kegs unless from brewery or manufacturer
 - Burned wire without proof of proper burning
 - Commercial property without proof of ownership
- Law enforcement is allowed access to records at any time

Audience: has anyone tried to pass similar legislation?



Response

- Worked with all jurisdictions in Pierce County to have a color that their contractors would paint their wire and copper
- Developed an informational flier to be handed out with all City of Puyallup building permits outlining theft deterrent practices



The Puyallup Police Department is concerned about **CONSTRUCTION THEFT**

- Copper, aluminum, brass, and other metals are stolen for their recycling value. Copper wire and pipe, brass fittings, and aluminum ladders are stolen by thieves to sell as scrap. Pipe and wire products are even stolen after being installed.
- New appliances, often stored in garage areas, are stolen while still in their boxes.
- Cabinets, windows, and doors stored in garages or rooms at construction sites are taken before they are installed. They are more easily taken when left outside.
- All types of lumber, especially plywood and treated wood, are hauled away in trucks by thieves.
- Air conditioning units have been known to be marked by thieves with the word "scrap" and dismantled to obtain the copper coils and cooling cores. If questioned by anyone as to their activity, they point to the marking and confirm that the equipment is to be scrapped. Thieves also use the anhydrous ammonia inside the unit for the manufacture of methamphetamine.
- Construction tools have always been a popular target for construction theft. Large tool boxes weighing as much as 500 pounds have been taken from sites in our city. Storage containers are also burglarized for tools and metals. Items taken include wall jacks, ladders, bologna cords, spider boxes, generators, and compressors.

You CAN prevent construction thefts:

- Call the Puyallup Police Problem Oriented Policing Unit at 253-770-3354 if you recognize your construction site as a potential target for criminals (valuable items have been delivered to your jobsite). The Police Department wants to work with you to reduce your chances of becoming a victim.
- Take reasonable steps to secure tools and building materials. Try and plan installations to less material is available to be readily stolen.
- Document serial numbers and permanently mark your construction tools to deter theft and increase chances of recovery.
- Always report all construction thefts and suspicious activities to the police.
- Consider providing or hiring your own security personnel to protect your investment. Jobsite security systems are also currently available from some companies.

Response

- Developed a sign to deter criminal activity that stated “All copper and wire on this construction site is marked and we will prosecute all thefts.”
- These signs were laminated and given to construction sites



Response

- POP unit conducted construction site surveys in the middle of the night looking for opportunity to steal items
- The POP unit then followed up with all superintendents of job sites that items could have been easily stolen



Puyallup Police Department Construction Site Survey

Location: _____

Construction company: _____

After hours contacts: _____

(name, position, phone)

(name, position, phone)

(name, position, phone)

Are there materials on the site that are attractive to thieves?

- Copper pipe or fittings
- Wire, other electrical parts
- Air conditioners, other appliances
- Tools, ladders
- Welders, generators

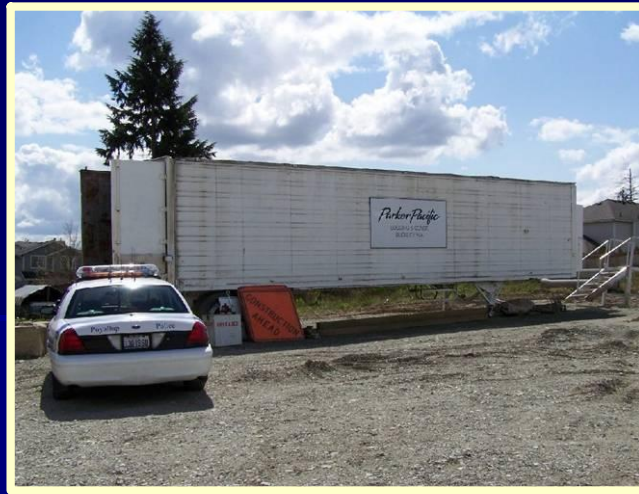
Security measures being taken:

- Adequate construction fencing with locking gates
- Locking containers (for tools/materials)
- Alarm system
- Video surveillance
- Lighting
- On-premise security
- Building is secured (has operable doors/windows)
- Marked building materials and tools (painted copper, etc.)
- Limited access to cars
- Portable hauling equipment secured

Comments/concerns: _____

- *Call the Puyallup Police Problem Oriented Policing Unit at 253-770-3354 if you recognize your construction site as a potential target for criminals (valuable items have been delivered to your jobsite). The Police Department wants to work with you to reduce your chances of becoming a victim. Experience has shown recently that once a jobsite has been burglarized, it is more likely the suspect(s) will return!*

Audit



- In the most recent construction site surveys, no items of opportunity were found
- Some sites have hired private security during the copper tubing/wiring installation phase of construction
- Some sites have painted their copper/wiring
- Sites are burying their temporary power
- Sites are using alarms such as "Tattletale"
- All sites are using our signage (trespass sign also)

Puyallup Police Trespass Notice



Undercover Operations

- **Informants** – to better understand the stolen metal market
- **Surveillance** – of likely targets
- **Use of bait vehicle** – goal is apprehension of suspects to gain more intelligence
- **VARDA alarms** – remote monitoring of sites, especially when they are at higher risk of being hit
- **Cameras** – both deterrence and assistance in solving crimes

Results

- Projected for 2007: **Over 50% decrease** in metal thefts compared to 2006
- **Note:** new law in effect halfway through the year – will have to wait to see the true impact of this legislation

Questions?

Contact Information

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