

Collaborative Efforts Help Combat Metal Thieves

Western Power Distribution

Reports of metal theft have reduced by around 50% across the Midlands this year.

The number of thefts from the electricity distribution network has also fallen. Western Power Distribution (WPD), which manages the electricity power network for the region, has reported a significant reduction with 251 incidents so far this year compared to 495 in 2012.

But WPD Security manager Peter Lowe says there can be no room for complacency: "Safety is our number one priority, which is why we have put a raft of measures in place to deter metal theft, but we have to remain vigilant.

"Some people are still prepared to dice with death in spite of the extremely high voltages involved with our equipment, and for very small reward. In doing so they put at risk the lives of our engineers who have to repair and replace infrastructure that may have been left in an unsafe condition, and the lives of innocent members of the public who could become victims," he said.

To deter thieves, WPD has stepped up security with CCTV, anti-vandal paint, electric fences, patrols, intruder alarms and by applying the forensically traceable solution Smartwater to its equipment.

It has also forged close links with police and scrap metal dealers – publishing a booklet and posters to help them easily identify WPD cables and equipment.

As an active partner, WPD sits on four regional Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) metal theft groups and helps with anti-metal theft operations and educational and enforcement visits to scrap metal dealers.

WPD recently opened the doors of its Tipton depot as a venue for the West Midlands group which comprises of West Midlands, Staffordshire, West Mercia, Warwickshire and British Transport Police. Over eighty officers took part over two days of training which included presentations from industry and culminated in a tour of WPD's state-of-the-art engineering academy where officers could see, in a safe environment, the types of electrical assets that were being targeted.

"There is no doubt that our partnership with the police has led to a significant reduction in thefts but the problem still exists and we will maintain our resolve to combat the thieves," said Peter.

Chief Inspector Ricky Fields heads up the regional metal theft group. He said:

"By working together with neighbouring forces, government and industry we are taking a comprehensive approach to metal theft and, in turn, trying to stay one step ahead of criminals across the region.

"We patrol hotspot areas and work closely with the owners of vulnerable buildings, such as churches and power stations, to provide crime prevention advice.

"We are also running Operation Tornado, a British Transport Police-led initiative from the Association of Chief Police Officers, which requires all scrap metal dealers in the East Midlands to comply with stringent rules when it comes to buying scrap.

"We also regularly stage ad-hoc roadside operations in the Midlands in a bid to keep thieves and handlers on their toes and send the message out that no time or place is safe to commit crime on our watch."

To report suspicious activity or any information about metal theft and handling contact the Police on 101 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Note for newsdesks:

- Western Power Distribution (WPD) is the distribution network operator for the Midlands, South West England and South Wales, and is responsible for delivering electricity to approximately 7.8 million customers in the UK.
- WPD is not an electricity supply company and does not bill customers in the UK. Its responsibility is to distribute electricity from the point of generation to homes and businesses.

For further information: Stella Hayward on 01332 827461

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