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Bill seeks scrap metals registry to combat theft

BY TRACY SEELYE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2011 03:00 PM

The theft of about 2,000 pounds of copper wiring from a National Grid construction site on Auburn Street in Whitman is the latest in a series of thefts of scrap metal from sites in the area.

The material, described as 1,000 feet of copper wire reportedly worth about \$1 per pound as scrap metal, was reported at 10:09 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 11 to Whitman police as a past breaking and entering over the previous weekend.

Police are reviewing surveillance-camera video from the site in their investigation, headed up by Whitman detective Stephen Drass.

The theft of copper wiring and piping has been an ongoing problem in the area as thieves target empty homes, businesses and other unprotected buildings or building sites for scrap metal, which is often sold to finance drug habits.

In Hanson, renovation of a restaurant on Route 27 to open as a new Butterfields location was delayed by the theft of pipes in the air conditioning system for the copper in August.

Whitman Police have also seen an increase in metal thefts — from snowplow blades, to appliances, wiring and piping.

Attorney General Martha Coakely, state senators James Timilty, D-Walpole, and Barry Finegold, D-Andover, are sponsoring legislation to control the trade in second-hand metals, including the creation of a computer resigistry of the materials.

According to state Rep. Geoffrey Diehl, R-Whitman, the bill enjoys support from both parties and both chambers, so it is expected to pass the legislature in the near future. It has been expedited along the committee process to get it to a vote soon.

“While I wish a bill like this weren’t necessary, it is the right thing to pass due to the increase in crime associated with the theft of certain metals that have value in the secondary marketplace,” Diehl said Tuesday, “You wish that scrap dealers would police their own industry, but since that has failed, we need a law that will keep people from stealing and selling items like guardrails, manhole covers, traffic signs, bleachers and even cemetery plaques.”

Diehl said he has personally seen the problem’s impact when his brother-in-law, who has been doing construction on his house, had his above-ground pool stolen from where he was storing it in his back yard.

“This bill will close some loopholes and stiffen penalties so that scrap dealers stop taking the risk of accepting materials that are clearly stolen property,” he said.

The situation has raised concern among Whitman selectmen for several weeks, cited at both the dedication of the new



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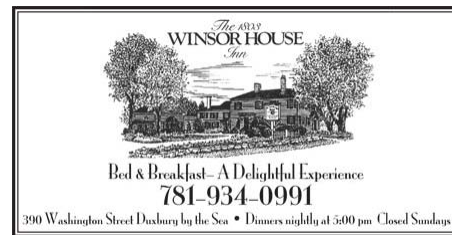
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police station on Sept.11 and in the approval of a business license for a new gold-buying business that same month — another commodity tempting would-be thieves in the area.

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