



Ecclesiastical Insurance Office plc

Box 2004, Suite 2200, 20 Eglinton Avenue West, Toronto, Ontario M4R 1K8 Telephone (416) 484-4555 Facsimile (416) 484-6352

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SOARING METAL PRICES LEADS TO SKYROCKETING INCIDENCE OF METAL THEFT

The growing worldwide demand for copper, lead, and other metals has outstripped the current supply causing a dramatic increase in price over the past several years. As a result, copper piping, downspouts, lead roofs, copper wiring, air conditioner parts and bronze statues have become targets for theft. Metal thieves range in expertise from the drug addict needing quick cash to highly organized criminal organizations. They often access buildings during the day by posing as legitimate contractors or wait until night when the buildings are quiet and under cover of darkness.

When older buildings were constructed, these metals were far less valuable, and no thought was given to the possibility of theft. It is important to recognize the potential targets your property may hold and to take preventative action. Innovative solutions have been developed, and these, along with some simple, commonsense deterrents, will minimize the possibility of a loss. Some of the available options:

1. Create a 'building watch' program. Buildings that are unattended or unoccupied for significant periods during the week can become targets for vandalism, break and enter, and potentially, arson. The program will consist of volunteers who pass by the building on a regular basis. A volunteer who lives nearby should be the designated contact person for the program and should liaise with the local police department, advising them of the program and its intent. The police would ideally assist with the program and its protocols and establish when and under what circumstances they are to be contacted. Volunteers should not confront suspicious people found on the premises, but should contact the building watch leader or the police.
2. Areas surrounding the building should be well lit. Exterior flood and/or motion sensor lighting and keeping interior lights on timers are effective deterrents.
3. Consider installing a security system, preferably monitored by a central station. Closed-circuit television is an effective deterrent in more problematic areas.
4. Perform regular checks of the building for missing parts, such as downspouts.
5. Cut back trees and other vegetation to increase ease of surveillance of the property.
6. Use tin-plated copper materials. The process of plating tin onto copper makes the material less visible and less attractive to metal recyclers.
7. Use tamper-resistant hardware, such as bolts for grounding devices. These bolts must be removed with a special nut driver and thus represent a deterrent to theft.
8. Paint metal items so that they no longer appear to be valuable. Ensure there are no restrictions on such changes (e.g. the building being listed as a heritage site)

9. Install steel cages over air conditioners and other HVAC equipment to prevent theft of their parts.
10. Place a protective metal sheath or metal cage over the lower section of conductor grounding ribbons of lightning rods to deter their removal.
11. When valuable metal items are stolen, replace them with less attractive materials, provided there are no restrictions (e.g. building being listed as a heritage site).
12. SmartWater – This security feature is not yet widely used in North America, but it has been an effective deterrent in the United Kingdom. The company is now developing partnerships with law enforcement within Canada that would allow its use here. SmartWater marks the metal with a traceable “DNA” that allows authorities to trace the metal back to its origin.
13. Data Dot or similar technologies can also be used to make metals traceable and have been adopted by law enforcement in Canada.

Other Risk Management Issues

For more information on this other risk management issues, visit our website at www.ecclesiastical.ca. Click on the Risk Management tab, then on “Click here to sign up now”. Complete the new user registration form and you will receive a return email confirming your password. Use your password and email address to access our risk management White Papers.

About Ecclesiastical Insurance

Ecclesiastical Insurance is the insurer of choice for Canada’s places of worship, retirement communities, education facilities, registered charities, and unique properties. The company was established in the United Kingdom in 1887 and opened in Canada in 1972. Ecclesiastical is owned by a charitable trust and is committed to serving the needs of its customers and the larger community. Group profits (other than funds required for business operations) are redistributed for the benefit of faith and charitable initiatives. Ecclesiastical is rated “A” by A.M. Best, and “A-” by Standard and Poor’s.

For more information about risk control or Ecclesiastical Insurance, please contact:

Stuart Rowley
Underwriting and Operations Manager for Canada
(416) 484-4918
srowley@eccles-ins.com

Jacinta Whyte
General Manager & Chief Agent for Canada
(416) 484-4900
jwhyte@eccles-ins.com