

From KVCB News

Turn in a copper thief, collect a reward

Imagine calling 911 only to find your phone service is down due to copper thieves. Embarq is trying to prevent it and now you can cash in on a hefty reward.

It's a problem that took many police departments by surprise: The sudden surge in copper theft across the county. From low level street busts to entire homes or businesses ripped apart for what's in the walls. It's a crime Metro is going after with a vengeance.

"Now that it's here, it's not going anywhere," Metro's Lieutenant Robert DuVall explains. "We can't let it become an epidemic."

And now Metro has found a corporate ally. Mike Howey is with corporate security for Embarq. His company is now offering a \$5,000 rewards for information that leads to the arrest and prosecution of anyone caught stealing the utility's wire. "Last year we experienced 59 incidents that cost \$457,000 to repair," Howey said.

That includes a caper last summer in which someone stole a water truck hooked a chain to it, and pulled down 1,000 feet of cable.

Repair and replacement costs aside, the bigger issue is public safety. "These criminals don't care. Take the service out of fire departments, governments; it's a terrorist act," insists Embarq foreman, Roger Vega.

And it's not just overhead wire thieves have targeted. In some cases they've lifted up manhole covers to see what they can steal underground. That's why Embarq has taken steps to lock up everything.

Lieutenant Duvall is with Metro's Property Crimes Detail. He says reward money is a great tool for bringing in tips. In the meantime, his officers are going after recycling companies, making sure they follow the letter of the law. "We also had companies spring up in backyards. They'd take the copper and sell it in California. We shut them down," Duvall said.

Now Embarq is hoping for the same kind of success by offering a little green. The Embarq reward is being offered through Crime Stoppers. That number is 385-5555.

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