

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Host Metal Theft Summit



On 25 February 2015, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) will host the Scottish Business Resilience Centre's Metal Theft Summit. The event highlights the devastating impact metal theft in Scotland has on our economy, businesses and public safety.

Speakers will include the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's Deputy Assistant Chief Officer David McGown, Mr. Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs and Chief Superintendent John McBride of the British Transport Police.

Metal theft puts lives at risk with the potential for cables to become exposed, dangerous chemicals to be released or fires to start being greatly increased. The cost of repair after metal theft can often outweigh the materials stolen and so the impact on businesses can be colossal.

Assistant Chief Officer Lewis Ramsay, Director of Prevention and Protection, SFRS, said: "Metal theft is extremely dangerous and causes huge problems for both the public and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

"Metal theft not only leaves businesses and communities out-of-pocket, but it puts life at extreme risk. Many hazards are created as a consequence of metal theft, not to mention the disruption it creates for the public going about their work and daily lives.

"Only recently in November 2014, 16 dry riser outlets were

stolen from a multi-story flat building within Cumbernauld, North Lanarkshire. The risers were swiftly replaced within 48 hours but were again stolen only two weeks later. Should there have been a serious fire in the affected building at the time of the dry riser being out of operation, the immediate lack of a sufficient water supply to the fire floor level could have led to the possibility of serious damage to the building, and worse, the increased potential for endangerment and loss of life to both residents, and firefighters.

“Metal theft is also extremely dangerous for the persons committing the crime. In July 2013, a man was killed in North Lanarkshire as he attempted to steal an 11000-volt overhead cable. This incident also left 280 homes without power.”

Mr. Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, said: “Metal theft is not a victimless crime. It affects everyone, from individuals and communities to churches and businesses – it can even put innocent people at risk – which is why the Scottish Government is continuing to clamp down on this extremely harmful and illegal activity.

“The Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill, currently with the Parliament, includes measures to improve the regulation of scrap metal dealers and end cash payments for scrap metal, making it more difficult for thieves to profit from their crime.

“Further to our proposals for tougher legislation more effective enforcement has also been introduced with the British Transport Police team now dedicated to tackling metal theft and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service adopting a tougher prosecution policy for this crime.

“This is an extremely disruptive, selfish and harmful crime and we will continue to do all we can to make Scotland a hostile environment for criminals involved in metal theft.”

Chief Superintendent John McBride, British Transport Police,

said: "Metal theft continues to disrupt the lives of Scottish people. Industry and communities continue to be affected with rail and electricity cable being stolen and damaged recently and schools have had to close following water damage when lead was stolen from roofs which impacts on the children's education, teachers and parents and comes with a not insignificant cost to taxpayers.

"Police forces and other enforcement agencies have been proactive and will continue to take steps to enforce the law and tackle metal thieves and those who help dispose of stolen material. We work in a broad partnership with industry and others to help safeguard their property, and we look forward to the Scottish Government's proposed new legislative arrangements for the Metal Recycling industry."

Chief Inspector Alistair Muir, Police Scotland, said:"Metal theft is a crime that affects all communities across the length and breadth of our country. Whilst Police Scotland remains committed to tackling this problem we cannot do this in isolation. A strong focused partnership remains the key to significantly reducing the incidents of metal theft and the resulting negative impact this type of crime has on our homes, transport infrastructure, communications, public services and businesses.

"By working in partnership we can reduce opportunities for criminals, improve detection rates and reduce market opportunities for stolen materials.

"2015 will see the implementation of significant changes to metal dealer licensing in Scotland bringing us more into line with England and Wales. Working with industry partners in metal recycling will be key to the success of these legislative changes. By supporting the majority of legitimate, ethical businesses we can focus on those unscrupulous dealers who trade on the misery metal thieves bring to our communities."

Mr. Iain Hetherington, Director General, British Metal Recycling Association, said: "The Summit comes at a very critical time. Metal theft is a major problem for the Scottish infrastructure and our communities.

"As police and public services are tightened it is imperative that we come up with smarter solutions to this insidious crime."

Mr. Guy Jefferson, Distribution Director, SP Energy Networks, said: "Metal theft from the electricity network continues to put lives at risk, and threaten the safety of communities. It beggars belief that criminals continue to dice with death for a few pounds worth of scrap metal. What is more concerning is their complete disregard for the power cuts they have caused, and the house fires they have started. "We support all efforts to stop these selfish criminals, and restrict their ability to sell stolen metal. Along with other industries, we are keen to see the new legislation that The Scottish Government is proposing on scrap metal implemented as quickly as possible."

Ms. Jessica Snow, Senior Technical Officer, Historic Scotland, said: "At a time of high global demand for raw materials, thieves are targeting lots of different types of metal on old buildings – especially lead and copper. The most common target seems to be lead from roofs, with churches being particular targets, although statues, lead downpipes and even war memorials have also been stolen. Obviously this is of great concern to Historic Scotland, so we're keen to work with our partners to formulate preventative measures and agree how best to deal with the immediate and longer-term effects of metal theft."

Mr. Paul Mumford, Crestatech, said: Substation theft causes severe safety risks both at the site and at customer premises. If such theft remains undetected, the safety risk to both engineers and first responders entering site without prior knowledge of the event is high. Crestatech have been working

with Scottish Power and SSE to detect such events and enable mitigation of the safety and service continuity risks that result.