



Questions and answers from the City of Sacramento about streetlight repairs following copper wire theft

April 2012

How long has the City been plagued by copper wire thefts?

The first reported stolen wire incident was in 2009. Since 2010, we've had over 325 reported locations of stolen wire. Each location can encompass several blocks and affect dozens of streetlights.

Why are thieves stealing the wire in Sacramento?

Thefts are occurring all over the nation, not just in Sacramento. The thieves are getting record amounts of cash in salvage for the wire as prices have risen from \$1.50 per pound in October 2008 to \$3.30 per pound today. For an average incident, the thieves are netting about \$240 from salvage. The repairs are costing the City about \$1,200 to \$1,800 for labor and materials, depending upon the extent of damage. When thieves remove wire from pullboxes, they not only remove copper wire but in some instances damage underground conduit and infrastructure requiring underground repairs.

How are they stealing the wire out of streetlights?

Wire thieves remove copper wiring from street lights by accessing conductors at pull boxes or at access (hand hole) covers at each individual street light pole. The wires are cut and they often attach the wiring to a pick-up truck hitch and pull out about 80 yards at a time. The copper wire is then stripped of its insulation before going to the salvage buyers.

In mid-2011 we determined that using metal security locking pullbox lids was successfully thwarting the thief's attempts to access pullboxes. Additionally welding hand hole covers at street light poles was restricting access. We immediately began installing the locking lids and welding hand hole covers at each location we repaired. So far, this practice has been an effective deterrent. We also immediately began requiring that our new development projects incorporate these theft prevention measures.

How much have copper wire thefts cost the City?

From 2010 through April 2012, we have repaired 175 locations and spent approximately \$1.2 million on materials and labor. The \$1.2 million spent thus far has covered the cost of completing repairs at 175 locations, and includes another \$550,000 in materials on-hand to restore more locations. We estimate that at least 22 percent or 9,000 of the City's 40,000 streetlights have been off-line due to copper thefts, some more than once.

It takes about two days to fix a streetlight that is not functioning. Why is the City now taking up to 12 months to repair a streetlight that is out due to copper theft?

We simply have been outmanned by the thieves. Since 2010, our city crews primarily worked on repairing theft sites along with regular maintenance of traffic signals and streetlights during the week. The same crews also voluntarily rotated weekends and worked solely on streetlight repairs. Given the limited resources and the work orders stacking up, the City staff quickly became overwhelmed, which pushed back the wait times on the list to four to six months of receiving the reported outage. The list grew dramatically between the summer of 2011 February of 2012. Last month, we concluded that some wait times were 12 months out.

Not only was the City short-handed, but copper thefts are often far more complicated to repair than replacing a bulb or repairing a simple electrical malfunction. The extent of damage at each location is not always immediately known until a detailed inspection is done and repairs begin.

As the situation worsened, we reevaluated our approach and realized that our employee crews could no longer keep up with their regular maintenance activities related to street lights and traffic signals and continue to repair stolen wire areas.

Why has it taken so long to get more repair staff on the job?

As soon as we realized the reports escalating, we started the bid process for an electrical contractor. In late 2011, after a competitive bid process, we executed an agreement with CB Grant Electric for \$95,000 in order to assist our crews with repairs.

Even with an electrical contractor on board, the list of new locations grew. New reports were being added on to the list in far greater numbers than the older reported locations were being repaired and coming off the list.

Last month, we determined that we needed to immediately increase our resources by bringing more contractors on board and identifying an additional \$2 million in funds to complete existing repairs within 90 days or less and respond to new repair sites within 90 days or less. City Council approved on April 10, 2012 the transfer of funds from the City's Risk Management Fund and the Sacramento County Measure A Half-Cent Sales Tax Fund for this purpose.

How is the City paying for the repairs?

The City has already depleted funds for this purpose that come from property owners through the Citywide Landscaping and Lighting Assessment District. As of April 2012, we estimated that a total of \$1 million is needed to repair existing sites in 90 days or less and up to \$1 million may be needed to repair new sites over the next year within 90 days of being reported. The money is coming from the City's Risk Management Fund and the Measure A Half-Cent Sales Tax. Funding will allow hiring of contractors, purchase of security lids, wire, and labor needed to repair sites. We are asking for City Council approval on April 10, 2012 to allocate the additional funding. We will then make use of other competitively bid contract lists to add more labor. With the additional funds, we will increase from two to 12 by the number of contract workers in the field by early May.

How will people know the repair date?

We realize that citizens want to know when their streetlights will be back on. To that end, we have constructed a [webpage](#) that displays the reports of streetlight "areas" that have been stripped and are on the repair wait list. Clicking on the red dot nearest the street where lights are out brings up a pop up box displaying the date the lights were reported out and the estimated month of repair. The repair crew will be inspecting 10 blocks in all directions of each reported area to be sure all are repaired before moving on to the next area/dot. The webpage also includes a link to a map displaying all the sites that have been repaired and when.

What can citizens do?

- Be vigilant. **Call 911 to report a crime in progress.** If workers tampering with streetlights are not seen near a vehicle with a City seal, police should be notified.
- Call the police tip line at 443-HELP, (443-4357) or text police at 274637 to report suspicious activity that is *not* occurring at the moment.
- **Call 311 to report a streetlight out** in your neighborhood.
- Also, they can check the webpage for the repair schedule and share the [webpage](#) with family, friends and neighbors.