

Meeting Date: 7/23/2013

Report Type: Staff/Discussion

Report ID: 2013-00555

Title: Update on Copper Wire Thefts Impact and Prevention

Location: Citywide

Issue: This report provides a comprehensive update on the City's copper wire theft mitigation activities.

Recommendation: Receive and file.

Contact: Linda Tucker, Media and Communication Specialist, (916) 808-7523, Office of the City Manager; Hector Barron, City Traffic Engineer (916) 808-2669, Department of Public Works

Presenter: Jerry Way, Director, (916) 808-7100, Department of Public Works; Linda Tucker, Media and Communications Specialist, (916) 808-7523, Office of the City Manager

Department: Public Works Department

Division: Transportation Division

Dept ID: 15001911

Attachments:

1-Description/Analysis

2-Background

City Attorney Review

Approved as to Form

Joe Robinson

7/16/2013 11:06:15 AM

City Treasurer Review

Reviewed for Impact on Cash and Debt

Russell Fehr

7/9/2013 11:19:12 AM

Approvals/Acknowledgements

Department Director or Designee: Jerry Way - 7/11/2013 5:45:13 PM

Description/Analysis

Issue: The City has addressed copper wire thefts in a number of ways: By tapping available resources, hiring additional repair support, buying theft-proof lids and copper wire identifiable as City property, as well as by a law enforcement crackdown. The above actions are reducing the number of thefts. Between February 2011 and January 2012, there were 228 copper wire theft incidents. Between February 2012 and January 2013, there were 139 – a reduction of nearly 40 percent. With the recent addition of stamped copper wire, the City expects the numbers to continue to decline.

Policy Considerations: This project is in accordance with the City General Plan guiding principles of promoting safety and livability by restoring street lights within 90 days.

Economic Impacts: None

Environmental Considerations:

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): This report is being presented for information only, so no CEQA requirements apply.

Sustainability: Not applicable.

Commission/Committee Action: Not applicable.

Rationale for Recommendation: The City Manager requested staff provide an update to City Council.

Financial Considerations: There are no financial implications associated with the report.

Emerging Small Business Development (ESBD): Not applicable.

Background

Since late 2010, when the price of copper started climbing, the City has been plagued by copper thieves. The toll on citizens having to live on darkened streets and the tax dollars spent on new wire and repairs has been staggering. At one point, the City was being hit by thieves once every two days, leaving blocks of residents in blackout conditions with every incident and a backlog of repair sites stretched out to one year.

The totals to date stand at more than 20,600 streetlights affected by wire theft, costing \$1.7 million to repair. Hardest hit neighborhoods have been Del Paso Heights, North Natomas, and East Sacramento.

In the last two years, the Department of Public Works and Police Department have worked together to implement aggressive tactics with an assist from the Human Resources Department. Staff and police set out to address a one-year backlog of repairs, reduce theft and step up law enforcement to catch copper wire thieves and work with the District Attorney's Office to prosecute thieves.

The departments have taken the following measures to take on the thieves as a result of Public Works efforts or as part of the Police Department's Metal Task Force created in 2012.

- Most recently, the City became the first in the state to buy copper wire stamped with "City of Sacramento." The wire is now identifiable as City property to law enforcement, recyclers, and the community. The set up cost is nominal and the stamping is free. Although the stamped insulation is often stripped from the wire by the thieves, the suspects may face arrest for possession of stolen property if caught with stamped insulation. Previously, arrests and prosecutions required catching the suspects in the act because there was no identifiable evidence.
- According to Police, nearly all of the 20 suspected thieves working alone or in groups have been arrested at some point and charged primarily with felony vandalism. With the introduction of stamped wire, police and prosecutors believe culpability on grand theft or burglary charges may be easier to establish.
- In April 2012, the City Council approved the establishment of a Capital Improvement Project (CIP) for streetlight repair (S15121800). Council also authorized the transfer of \$1 million from the Measure A Maintenance (Fund 2026) and \$1 million from the Risk Fund (Fund 6502) to pay for

materials and contracted labor to respond to the year-long back log of repairs. The City then had the resources to commit to repairing streetlights within 90 days or less.

- Also in April 2012, the City launched a webpage dedicated to copper wire theft to explain the scope of the damage. Updated statistics on the number of streetlights affected and dollars spent, a map showing locations hit, and the scheduled repair date have been helpful toward educating the public who wanted answers about why their lights were out and when they would be back on.
- In late 2011, the Department of Public Works started purchasing metal, locking pull box lids. The new lids replace those damaged by thieves as they seek to access the wire. Although slightly more costly at \$100 each, the lids have proven to be theft proof.