

Crime Mapping & Analysis Program *at Washington College*



-Farm Owner Bulletin-

With the increasing price of metals, the farming community is currently in the season of copper irrigation system thefts. In the past several years your industry has been hard hit with equipment and scrap metal theft, primarily from pivot irrigation systems. Thieves target these systems during the winter, when the irrigation systems are not being used with any regularity. The Maryland State Police RAPID Team has partnered with the Maryland Farm Bureau and the Crime Mapping and Analysis Program at Washington College to educate law enforcement and the farming community with the goal of reducing irrigation system thefts.

While law enforcement is using new investigative tools to prevent, identify and recover stolen items, we are asking the farming community for additional assistance in being vigilant. Farmers should be on the lookout for unusual tire tracks, scraps of wire, wire insulation and signs equipment has been tampered with on their property. Farmers are encouraged to maintain a list of people who have access to their property; employee's full/part-time and seasonal, family members and others, including those who may lease or hunt on the property. Lists should include vehicle descriptions with vehicle registration states and numbers. Even if you are unable to obtain names, a vehicle tag number can be useful to law enforcement when investigating a crime. Farmers are encouraged to check their equipment on a regular basis, report suspicious activity regardless of time of day and report any crime as quickly as possible.

In order to maximize the amount of money they will receive from scrap metal dealers, suspects have been known to use fire to melt the insulation off of copper wire. The melting of insulation can be accomplished by using a burn pit or a burn barrel. Examples of a burn pit and burn barrel can be seen in the pictures to the right. The process of melting the insulation off of copper wire leaves burn marks on the ground in addition to omitting thick black smoke and a strong chemical/burnt rubber odor.



The Maryland Farm Bureau will be sending out a survey shortly and asking farmers with irrigation systems to complete it. The purpose of the survey is to collect basic information that will help law enforcement, now and in the future, to proactively address the areas of the state where irrigation thefts have and are occurring. You are encouraged to complete your survey and return it to the Maryland Farm Bureau as soon as possible.



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There are several steps you can take to greatly assist law enforcement and possibly stop some crimes:

- Initiate a neighborhood watch program and post signs
- Be aware of who is in your neighborhood while you are out and about
- Write down tag numbers of vehicle that are unfamiliar to your area
- Write down tag numbers and vehicle descriptions of vehicles that are doing work on utility poles or telephone lines, etc. While most are legitimate, some thieves use these type vehicles to commit crimes.
- Be familiar with tools commonly used to commit this type of crime. These include: hacksaws, wire cutters, bolt cutters, tin snips and battery powered reciprocating saws (sawzall). If you see vehicles with these tools contact law enforcement and obtain a description of the vehicle and a tag number.
- While inspecting your property in addition to the burn pits described and pictured above; look for pieces of rubber or plastic casings of different colors. The metal is often cut into sections several feet long when it is removed.

If you become a victim, please notify law enforcement immediately and do not disturb the scene by touching items that may have been left behind such as, tools, footprints or tire tracks. The effects of coming into contact with the residue or fumes from the burning of insulation can include lung irritation, cardiac problems and an increased risk of cancer. Dioxins, commonly associated with burnt insulation, are easily absorbed and stored in fat tissue. They are known carcinogens, and even low concentrations can cause serious health problems.

Below are some of the questions you may be asked by law enforcement to aid in their investigation:

- A Copy of your Metal and Wire Theft Worksheet (part of the Maryland Farm Bureau survey).
- A complete description of the items stolen or damaged. If wire or metal, make sure that you provide the total length, size of the wire, convert to weight if possible.
- Date(s) the equipment was last seen or known to be working properly.
- Note any tools, tracks or other items found on your property that is unfamiliar to you.
- Note any unusual activity in, on or around your property.
- Note any recent hires, terminations or deliveries to your farm.

