



COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY
TRANSPORTATION CABINET
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Andy Beshear
GOVERNOR

Jim Gray
SECRETARY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Naitore Djigbenou
502.782.4829
naitore.djigbenou@ky.gov

Media Contact: Chuck Wolfe
502.892.9038
chuck.wolfe@ky.gov

Media availability offered today 9:00 a.m. EST in Louisville. Details below.

Transportation Cabinet Increases Reward to \$5,000 for Help in Catching Copper Wire Thieves Pillaging Highway Lights

Criminal destruction hampers safety, costs taxpayers hundreds of thousands for repairs

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Feb. 21, 2023) – The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) has doubled the reward being offered in the battle against thieves who have been stealing copper wire from interstate highway lighting systems.

The offer is now \$5,000 for information leading to arrests and prosecution of the thieves, whose crimes already have caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages. That cost is ultimately borne by Kentucky taxpayers. The crime also takes a toll on highway safety as major interchanges are left darkened.

“Stealing copper is a crime that victimizes all Kentucky taxpayers,” said KYTC Secretary Jim Gray. “Stolen wiring has to be replaced, broken lighting systems have to be repaired, and it’s the taxpayers who are left with the bill.”

The Louisville area has been especially hard hit. Officials in KYTC District 5, which includes Jefferson County, estimate that thieves have stripped light poles and junction boxes of about 94,000 feet of copper wire – nearly 18 miles’ worth. The damage estimate to date is close to \$380,000.

Thefts in District 5 have occurred along Interstate 64 between Exit 3 and I-264 (Watterson Expressway) and at eight other interchanges in Louisville: Exits 1 and 3 on I-64; Exits 127, 130, 132, 133 and 134 on I-65; and Exit 4 on I-264. About 500 light poles in the area have been damaged – some more than once.

KYTC is partnering with the Kentucky Department of Homeland Security to spread the word that copper wire theft from highway lights endangers the public and puts motorists at risk. The thieves also run a risk: High voltage in the lines could result in electrocution.

While copper wire theft also occurs on private property, interstate and highway lighting systems are often targets.

“Even if thieves only steal a portion of the wire, we have to replace the entire length of the wire within the conduit run because the wire can’t be reconnected,” said District 5 Chief District Engineer Matt Bullock. “With the public’s help, we can focus transportation funds on needed community projects, prevent future theft and even save a life as the risk of electrocution while stealing is high.”

The following photos show individuals stealing wire from lighting systems in Jefferson County. [Photo 1](#) [Photo 2](#) [Photo 3](#) State officials are seeking help from the public to identify these persons or anyone else suspected of stealing copper wire on Kentucky highways.

Kentuckians can contact the following contacts with information:

- Report any information about wire thefts at Kentucky interchanges to the KYTC Office of Inspector General (OIG) Office at 502-330-7506. If your information leads to an arrest and conviction, you may be eligible for the reward.
- Report active crimes or suspicious activity to local law enforcement.
- Report dark intersections to the KYTC Traffic Operations Center at 877-FOR-KYTC.

“Like catalytic converter thefts, stealing copper becomes more common during difficult economic times,” said KYTC Office of Inspector General Director Maryellen Mynear. “We’re asking the public to watch for and report suspicious activity, such as people in unmarked vehicles working near lighting equipment or wire attached to the hitch of a vehicle. This strategy has proven to be successful in the past so we’re asking for the public’s help again to curb this type of crime.”

In 2014, a rash of copper wire thefts occurred along interstates and parkways in central Kentucky. A \$2,500 reward was offered by KYTC and Kentucky State Police, prompting an informant to come forward. Two residents of Clark County ultimately were arrested, indicted and pleaded guilty to a combination of misdemeanor and felony theft charges.

Culprits break into lighting systems and junction boxes to pull, cut and strip the wires. They often look to sell the scrap metal to recycling facilities in and out of the state. With damage exceeding \$3,000, the thief or thieves could face Class D felony charges, which carry possible prison sentences of five to 10 years. To deter theft, state law requires recycling centers to obtain identification of sellers and a certified statement as to the sources of the scrap metal being sold.

“Thieves are netting only a fraction of what it costs our taxpayers to fix broken infrastructure and to replace wire,” said Director Mynear. “We’re working with recyclers, local law enforcement and the

Department of Homeland Security to crack down on the illegal sale of stolen wire, and we appreciate the public's help in preventing these crimes.”

NOTE: In-person media availability will be offered from 9 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. today with KYTC Department of Highways Chief District Engineer Matt Bullock at Lannan Memorial Park at 2375 Lannan Park Rd in the parking lot near the playground.

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