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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Transportation Cabinet Offers \$2,500 Reward to Help Curb Copper Wire Theft on State Highways**

*More than 45,000 feet of wire stolen from roadway lighting and systems*

**LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Aug. 31, 2022)** – A recent string of copper metal thefts in Louisville has left more than 500 poles dark on interstates and state officials are calling on the public to help catch the culprits and prevent future theft. The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) is offering a \$2,500 reward for information that will help lead to the arrest and prosecution of those responsible for the theft.

“Stealing copper is not a victimless crime,” said Kentucky Transportation Cabinet Secretary Jim Gray. “Taxpayers are left holding the bag to pay to replace the stolen wires and repair broken lighting systems. If you see suspicious activity or know of anyone involved in stealing state property, please report it.”

This year, the Department of Highways District 5 office estimates between 45,000-66,000 feet of copper wire, known as #6 AWG, has been stolen from roadway lighting poles and junction boxes along Interstate 64 between Exit 3 and Interstate 264 in addition to eight other interchanges in Louisville: Exit 1 and Exit 3 on I-64; Exits 127, 130, 132, 133 and 134 on Interstate 65; and Exit 4 on I-264. Stolen wire stops the flow of electricity and has impacted lighting on an estimated 500 light poles in Louisville. KYTC is partnering with the Kentucky Department of Homeland Security to spread the word that this activity endangers the public and puts motorists at risk. The high voltage current in these lines may also electrocute would-be thieves.

While the cost to restore power to affected lighting systems will be determined once work begins, it is estimated the cost of the wire alone will be between \$30,600 to \$44,880, plus contractor installation costs. While copper wire theft can range from cellular towers to vacant homes, nationally, 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.”

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 888-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, 48 copper wire thefts occurred on central Kentucky interstates and parkways. A \$2,500 reward was offered by KYTC and the Kentucky State Police for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators. A confidential informant provided information which helped authorities identify and arrest the thieves.

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. The terms of imprisonment for a Class D felony are not less than five years nor more than 10 years unless otherwise provided in law. To deter theft, state law requires recycling centers to obtain identification of the seller and a certified statement as to the source of the scrap metal.

“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.”

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** In-person media availability will be offered from 9 a.m. – 9:45 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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