



# Increase in Copper Wire Theft – Not Just Street Lights

City of Saint Paul leaders to champion proposed new state legislation co-authored by Senator Pappas and Representative Hollins to curb the selling of stolen copper metals

In recent years, the City of Saint Paul has experienced an exponential increase of both new and reoccurring copper wire theft from street light fixtures both in city right of way and parks. The theft areas have drastically expanded from a few, regular targeted street lights in isolated areas to now impacting the entire city, including public and private infrastructure such as:

- Park trails and parking lots
- Major arterial and collector streets
- Traffic signals
- EV charging stations
- Street lights
- Ground access panels
- Utility vaults
- Heating and air conditioning systems
- Private businesses and homes

The City of Saint Paul is not unique in dealing with rampant wire theft from public and private infrastructure. Other Minnesota cities, municipalities, and utilities are reporting increase in copper wire thefts. In all parts of the country, wire theft is a growing issue.

## New Proposed Copper Metal Legislation

The City of Saint Paul is leading new state legislation, alongside authors Sen. Pappas and Rep. Hollins. The proposed legislation, HF 4461/ SF 4455 would:



**Require any person who is buying or selling copper metal to have a license issued by the state. Persons licensed to perform electrical work are deemed to hold a license.**



**Allow residents and businesses to still recycle copper materials with scrap metal companies for free.**

The proposed legislation builds off the success of Minnesota’s catalytic converter laws in drastically reducing the market demand and reselling of stolen materials. One significant challenge with copper wire and materials is, unlike catalytic converters, they are not registered and hard to track, especially when they are stripped of the insulation. This proposed legislation is gaining attention and support from other cities, municipalities, utilities, and labor organizations.

### Why Are They Stealing Copper Wire? Market Demand!

Since 2020, the price for scrap copper metal has been at all-time highs. As of March 18, 2024, copper metal was valued at \$4.13 per troy ounce. According to scrapmetal.com, which tracks state averages paid for materials at scrap yards in Minnesota, bare #1 copper wire scrap is being purchased for an average of \$3.65 per pound.

### What Can Residents and Businesses Do?

1. If you see something, say something. Call 911! Report suspicious behavior or activity around street lights, traffic signals, EV chargers, utility vaults, or private property. With the help of the watchful eyes of Saint Paul residents and business owners, the Saint Paul Police Department has caught and arrested thieves.
2. Join Camera Watch. Registering your residential or business security camera and coverage information with the Saint Paul Police Department can help create safer neighborhoods for all. Your information is kept confidential. With this voluntary program the police department does not have access to your cameras but keeps a record of active cameras throughout the city. They may reach out to owners if and when needed.
 

Register your camera by scanning the QR code, or by visiting <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/2f3b660e185c4e02bc76930c89aa1823>
3. Reach out to your legislators to thank them for supporting the proposed copper wire legislation and encourage others to as well. Find your legislator: <https://www.gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/>

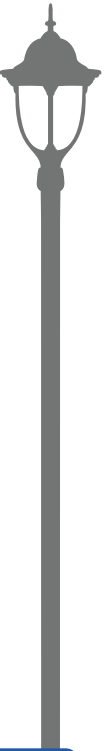
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# Saint Paul Continues to Address Ongoing Wire Theft



## 42K

TOTAL STREET LIGHTS

37,000 street lights and 32,000 street light poles are maintained by Saint Paul Public Works and more than 5,000 street lights are maintained by Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.

## \$1.2M

REPAIRS IN 2023

\$1.2 million was spent by the City of Saint Paul in 2023 to repair and replace wire theft from street lights and signals in the public right of way and park facilities.

## \$250K

REPAIRS IN 2019

In 2019, Saint Paul spent approximately \$250,000 on wire theft issues, **more than quadrupling the non-budgeted expenses** for the city in five years.

## 2K OUTAGES

IN PARK SYSTEM

In February 2024, an **estimated 2,000 street lights in Saint Paul parks were dark** due to wire theft (does not include Public Works maintained street lights).

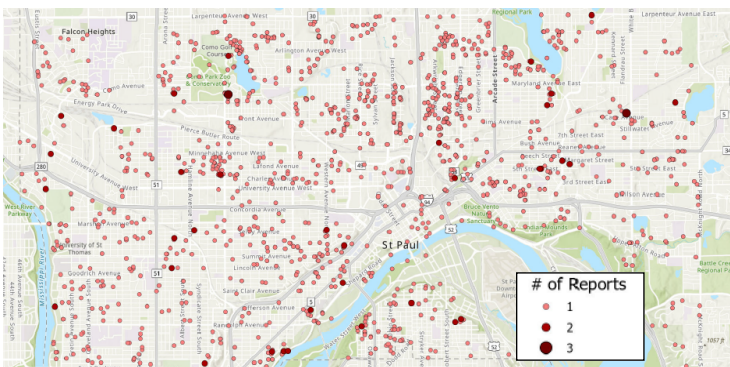
## Comprehensive Strategy to Address Wire Theft:

- Maintaining and repairing damaged street lights and other public infrastructure
- Exploring engineering and infrastructure program changes where possible
- Increasing public education and engagement efforts, encouraging people to report all suspicious activity to 911
- Executing all law enforcement and prosecution strategies currently available
- Collaborating with local, state officials, residents, and businesses to support and pass new proposed state copper metal legislation

During the winter months, Saint Paul did not have decrease in wire theft.

In 2024, Mayor Carter and Saint Paul City Council approved an additional \$500,000 for Saint Paul Public Works. This includes hiring a seasonal, full-time electrician crew who are dedicated to repairing damaged street lights and other infrastructure.

## Reports of Wire Theft: January-December 2023



## How Are We Preventing Theft?

City staff continues to try a number of different strategies to prevent and deter wire theft, including:

- Welding, epoxying, and banding access panels
- Using security bolts and screws to close and secure the access panels
- Installing new custom molded access panels, replacing broken or stolen panels
- Keeping streetlights on, or “daylighting,” to keep the wires electrified during the daytime
- Using smaller gauge wire, which is less valuable for resale
- Labeling our wire with “City of Saint Paul” to identify the ownership for authorities and recyclers
- Silent alarms
- Exploring changing street light fixtures to solar and/or using overhead wires
- Considering changing street light fixtures to aluminum wiring
- Piloting high access panel street lights (coming in 2024)

To date, these efforts have not prevented wire theft. Some efforts resulted in additional damage to the street light fixtures and/or “moved” the thefts to another part of the city.



To learn more about wire theft and view the full list of FAQs, visit [stpaul.gov/streetlights](http://stpaul.gov/streetlights)