

Security – Metal Theft

Metal theft remains a significant concern for businesses and organisations.

This Loss Prevention Standard provides general security guidance to help protect against the theft of metals.

Security – Metal Theft

Introduction

Metal theft remains an ever-present security risk, with the rate of incidents increasing in reaction to factors such as scrap metal prices, recession cycles, the prevalence of metal within the built environment and focussed attention from organised criminal gangs.

Whilst thieves have traditionally targeted non-ferrous metals (NFM) such as copper, lead, tin and related alloys, e.g., brass and bronze, higher values mean that traditionally less attractive NFM such as aluminium and ferrous metals, such as iron and steel (stainless and mild) should also be treated as a target. In more recent years, live electrical cabling has been targeted, which can lead to significant damage and downtime.

This Loss Prevention Standard outlines the main risks and provides guidance to help reduce the potential for theft related damage and loss.



What is at risk?

Metal theft is no longer confined to the easily removable contents of buildings and yards, and now extends to include the buildings themselves, e.g., building roof coverings, roof flashings, door hardware, boilers and plumbing, electrical cables/substation components, as well as premises gates, fencing, sculptures/statues, highway signs and drain/manhole covers.

In recent years, the increased use of roof mounted solar photovoltaic installations has led to a number of significant cable and panel (high copper content) thefts.

Empty buildings and construction sites are at increased risk. With many empty buildings not being visited regularly and typically also lacking remotely monitored intruder alarm protection, they can be prone to a 'strip out' - where nearly all metal is removed by thieves, e.g., electrical cable/switchgear, pipework, radiators, flashings, and even structural steelwork. Such an event often results in significant property damage, and downtime.

Historic buildings, which often incorporate considerable amounts of lead and copper roofing, can be at particular risk. Removed sections of roofing can result in disproportionate structural damage due to water ingress.

Note: Signs of damp or water ingress may provide an early indication of otherwise unnoticed theft of roofing or roof flashings, and so should always be promptly investigated.

Managing the Risks

Risk Assessment

A risk assessment should be completed to identify:

- What metals are present.
- Where they are located.
- Anticipated values.
- Attractiveness to thieves.
- Means of access.
- Business impacts as a result of their loss.

The current security measures should then be assessed for suitability and any further protections considered. A checklist is provided at the rear of this document to assist.

When considering current or future security, it can be helpful to think of 'layers' of protection, each layer needing to be overcome by thieves before they achieve their aim. A resilient security programme is best achieved via a complementary range of measures in place at each 'layer', helping to:

Deter – Removing the risk at source.

Detect – Identifying criminals and ensuring an early intervention.

Delay – Requiring criminals to overcome a series of security measures.

Defend – Generating a prompt intervention.

Note: In the event of metal theft, careful consideration needs to be given as to whether it is replaced at all, replaced in smaller quantities, replaced with something less attractive/valuable, or, if replaced like for like, is provided with enhanced security. If a replacement strategy is not considered in such terms, it is quite likely a repeat loss will occur.

Deterrence

Reducing the availability of valuable materials significantly lowers the risk of theft. The following precautions should therefore be considered:

- Reducing the level of metal stock held.
- Where possible, keeping metal stock out of sight from the public and visitors.
- During refurbishment works, replacing metal roofing/flashings with materials unattractive to thieves, e.g., coated steel sheet, glass reinforced plastic (GRP), non-lead flashing, felt, etc.

Note: Your property insurer and broker should be consulted before replacing any metal roofing with felt or other combustible materials. Also, consider any restrictions imposed by local regulatory or heritage planning requirements.

The use of forensic marking compounds should be considered. These products are easily applied and bond to the metal surface. They are hard to remove and readily detected under ultraviolet (UV) light. Once recovered, they can be analysed to reveal the registered source address and returned to the owners. Aviva Specialist Partner [Selectamark](#) can assist with forensic marking solutions.

Displaying notices or window stickers in prominent areas, such as site entrances, to widely advertise that items are 'security marked' can also prove a significant deterrent.

Physical Security

The adequacy of existing physical security arrangements, e.g., door and window locks, padlocks, security shutters and other barriers, etc., should be assessed, starting at the boundary perimeter and working inwards, considering the potential for metal theft at each stage. Overlapping layers of security will build increased resilience into your protections, using the deter, detect, delay and defend principles mentioned earlier.

Perimeter Security

Undertake a review of the perimeter security arrangements, e.g., walls, fencing, gates, etc., to identify the effectiveness of existing measures and where improvement could be made.

The following areas should be considered:

- Minimise external storage. Where unavoidable, locate in areas with no visibility.
- Ensure boundary walls, fences and gates are in good order and that there are means of safely securing entrances when not in use.
- Remove or relocate any items that may aid opportunistic scaling of walls and fences.
- Cut back overgrown vegetation so any potentially criminal behaviour is more visible.
- Consider additional measures to restrict vehicular access, such as telescopic security bollards.

External Building Security

Lead/copper roofs, flashings, lightning conductor systems, gutters/downpipes and solar photovoltaic cables are common targets, particularly during periods when construction or refurbishment work is taking place.

The following should be considered:

- Portable ladders should be removed from sight and secured to prevent criminal use.
- Fixed ladders and any scaffolding should be secured from unauthorised use, e.g. use of ladder guards.
- Hindering access to the roof by installing barbed/razor wire along roof edges and/or anti-climb spikes to downpipes, etc.

Note: To help avoid any legal liability issues that may otherwise arise, such security measures should be installed above 2.5 m in height with suitable warning signs displayed.

- Painting downpipes and roofing with non-setting paint, sometimes called 'anti climb' paint to deter/hinder access, and potentially aid the identification of criminals.
 - ✓ Ensure the use of such paints is clearly labelled to help deter thieves.

Internal Building Security

Metals deemed attractive to thieves should be stored in areas of robust construction, with access doors and windows kept in good condition and suitably secured.

Refer to the Aviva Loss Prevention Standard **Security - Doors, Windows and Other Barriers** for further guidance.

If in doubt, the advice of a competent locksmith, e.g., a member of the Master Locksmiths Association, should be sought.

Further restricting access to items in the building can be achieved by:

- Locking internal doors.
- Reviewing window security, including whether these can be permanently secured shut.
- Installing a secured inner area, e.g., stockroom, store or cage and limiting the number of entry points which serve it.

Electronic Security

There are a variety of electronic security systems available to detect criminal activity, which can cover both external and internal areas. Advice should be sought from the local police crime prevention team or property insurer before proceeding with any security enhancements.

- **Video Surveillance Systems (VSS).** An external remotely monitored, detector-activated VSS can be particularly effective in detecting potential intruders before a break-in is attempted. The nature of such systems requires careful attention to system design and operating procedures if they are to be effective.

Refer to the Aviva Loss Prevention Standard **Video Surveillance Systems – Introduction** for further guidance.

- **Monitored Intruder and Hold-up Alarm Systems (I&HAS).** These systems notify building occupiers that an intruder has been detected, and arrange for police attendance, where configured to do so.

Further guidance is provided in the Aviva Loss Prevention Standard **Intruder and Hold Up Alarms - General Guidance**.

- **External Intruder Alarm Systems.** These are designed for building exteriors, roof areas and open spaces, and can be configured to notify site occupiers, allowing for prompt attendance.
- **Security Fogging.** This security protection is operated by alarm sensors. When activated, the protected area is rapidly filled with a dense, non-harmful fog which obscures vision, and may prevent potential intruders from clearly seeing theft-attractive items (such as metal stocks) whilst hindering their movement within the premises. Additional information on this topic is provided by the RISC Authority via their publication: **S7 Security Guidance for Fog Devices**.

Human Surveillance

Depending on the size of the site, and the metal values at risk, manned guarding may be warranted, particularly if there has been a spate of such thefts in the local area. Areas to consider are:

- Outside of working hours manned guarding should incorporate security patrols with designated routes with a means of tracking and Proof of Presence Reporting.
- Temporary manned guarding should also be considered where the site is to be shut for holidays or extended periods.

Security companies should be selected from:

- [Security Industry Authority \(SIA\)](#) approved contractors.
- [National Security Inspectorate \(NSI\)](#) Gold/Silver approved contractors.

Surveillance may also be provided by neighbours, who should be asked to inform you or the police of any unusual activity.

In this regard, it should be ensured that you:

- Provide suitable contact details.
- Inform them of times when the premises will usually be in use, or open to visitors and similarly, when you are/are not expecting contractors to be on site.

Note: Many thefts of roofing have taken place where neighbours have seen thieves in action and, in the absence of contact with/information provided by the property owner, have either assumed the thieves were contractors working at the premises, or have been told this by the thieves and accepted it.

Recovery

The police are alert to the problem of metal theft, and many forces have special units/operations targeting metal theft, with reputable scrap dealers actively looking to assist them, e.g., by refusing cash transactions, verifying seller identification and maintaining seller details on record, and by using UV lights to check offered scrap metal for any forensic marking.

Even if stolen metal is recovered, the police may be unable to successfully prosecute those in possession of it, or return it to the true owners without proof of ownership, so consideration should be given to:

- The use of non-drying forensic 'gels' or 'greases', as these transfer and stick to thieves handling marked items.
- Taking photographs of historic items.

Note: In the event of a loss, photographs can also assist in restoration or in establishing the value of the claim.

Checklist

A generic **Metal Theft Checklist** is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

Specialist Partner Solutions

Aviva Risk Management Solutions can offer access to a wide range of risk management products and services at preferential rates via our network of Specialist Partners.

- Electronic Security Systems- [Secom](#)
- Vacant Property Protection - [Orbis Protect](#)
- Vacant Property Protection - [VPS](#)
- Security Marking [Selectamark](#)

For more information please visit: [Aviva Risk Management Solutions - Specialist Partners](#)

Sources and Useful Links

- [Security Industry Authority \(SIA\)](#)
- [National Security Inspectorate \(NSI\)](#)
- [Master Locksmiths Association \(MLA\)](#)

Note: Whilst UK standards and legislation are referenced in this document, other international standards and legislation should be referenced where applicable.

Additional Information

Relevant Aviva Loss Prevention Standards include:

- **Intruder and Hold Up Alarms - General Guidance**
- **Security - Doors, Windows and Other Barriers**
- **Video Surveillance Systems - Introduction**

To find out more, please visit [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#) or **speak to one of our advisors.**

Email us at riskadvice@aviva.com or call 0345 366 6666.*

*The cost of calls to 03 prefixed numbers are charged at national call rates (charges may vary dependent on your network provider) and are usually included in inclusive minute plans from landlines and mobiles. For our joint protection telephone calls may be recorded and/or monitored.

Appendix 1 – Metal Theft Checklist

Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Metal Theft	Y/N	Comments
1.	Does the building roof have areas that are covered with lead or copper sheets, or other metal-based roof flashing / fixtures?		
2.	Are any yard areas enclosed by substantial fencing and locked gates?		
3.	Have you provided nearby neighbours with contact details for premises keyholders?		
4.	Are planned grounds maintenance arrangements in place to ensure that hedges/shrubs do not grow so that they block a neighbours' view and thus conceal thieves?		
5.	Have you determined what metal-based building components / services or other metal items are on the premises that may be at risk of theft, and their value?		
6.	Are doors and windows fitted with good quality locking devices that are secured whenever the premises are unattended?		
7.	If the premises contain stocks of metal used in a production process, are they retained within a secured store or cage?		
8.	Is theft attractive stock kept out of sight from the general public?		
9.	Have ladders and any other means of accessing upper storey heights been secured against unauthorised use?		
10.	Are the premises protected by a remotely monitored intruder alarm system? (internal and external)		
	Where there are items in the open, are these areas covered by Video Surveillance Systems (VSS) which can be remotely monitored?		

	Metal Theft	Y/N	Comments
12.	Are stock levels of metal used in any manufacturing process minimised i.e., ordered on a 'just in time' basis?		
13.	Is there a strategy for replacing any metal-based building fixtures with materials less likely to be of attraction to thieves?		
14.	For any metal fixtures, are surfaces applied with a forensic marking compound?		
15.	Are prominent warning notices displayed which advertise the security measures in place?		
16.	Have you sought independent crime prevention advice from the police or your property insurer before proceeding with any security enhancements?		
17.	Have you sourced security devices and products from reputable organisations such as those accredited by the schemes mentioned in this guidance document?		
18.	Has security been reviewed after any theft or break-in to reduce the risk of a repeat incident?		
19.	Additional Comments:		

Please Note

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