

## CRIME: York Region job sites, car dealerships hit for metal



STAFF PHOTO/JIM MASON

Thieves in York Region have cut catalytic converters off vehicles at car dealerships and on local streets. They're also stealing metal from construction sites across the region, including Stouffville.

# THIEVES CASHING IN ON SCRAP

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As the price of precious metal continues to rise, York police are keeping an eye out for thieves seeking to capitalize on the market.

The theft of metal, be it copper, bronze or whole automotive parts, such as catalytic converters, which are stripped for several precious elements, has been taking place in York for several years.

Thieves go after whichever metal can land them a profit, police say.

And, while bandits are not currently hitting residential neighbourhoods, businesses are bearing the brunt of the thefts, according to investigators.

To combat theft, police will often monitor areas that have been repeatedly hit with the aim of spotting unusual activity.

Last year, thieves targeted a Markham car dealership and cut out catalytic converters, which are designed to reduce vehicle emissions, from vehicles on the lot, York Regional Police Det. James Kennedy said.

In a March 2008 incident in Whitchurch-Stouffville, catalytic converters were removed from five vehicles, police said.

The converters contain precious metals including platinum, palladium and rhodium.

Platinum and palladium have increased in value during the past year.

Global investors are putting money in precious metals because they tend to hold their value even if difficult economic times ravage stocks and bonds, The Wall Street Journal reported this week.

Drug addiction and poverty are fuelling some of the metal theft in the region, Det. Kennedy noted.

Companies that compile bins of scrap to sell to recyclers have, themselves, been targeted by thieves, Det. Kennedy said.

And that kind of theft often hits owners of smaller companies hard because they may rely on the sale of scrap metal to make ends meet, Det. Kennedy noted.

"That's coming right out of (the owner's)

pocket," he said.

Police say businesses should consider installing video equipment if they are worried about being targeted for precious or scrap-metal.

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Hydro transformers in York have also been broken into, sometimes repeatedly for spools of copper wire, and York police have heard of barbecue cylinders, steel kegs and construction torches being stolen from job sites, Det. Kennedy said.

Sites in new subdivisions in Stouffville have been hit by thieves.

"When they are breaking into compounds and stealing the stuff, that's a problem," Det. Kennedy said.

Police dealt with an example of that in March 2009 when a Brampton man was charged with theft and break-in offences after five tons of rolled copper wire was stolen from a compound in East Gwillimbury. The copper was later found in Peel Region.

Even York Region cemeteries have been targeted. Police made arrests in September 2009 after workers spotted two men with a pickup truck using a pry-bar to remove bronze nameplates from several headstones at a Vaughan cemetery.

Ultimately, while some may consider the content of the bins to be junk, the police view the taking of scrap metals to be an offence.

"It is a theft," Det. Kennedy said, noting scrap metal is no longer "the garbage of old".

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