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### Backflow Preventer Thefts Plague Country

By now we have all heard about scrap metal theft going on in Southern California. These thefts range from copper wire being stolen from job sites to catalytic converter's being removed from parked cars. As the value of scrap metal increases and the economy continues to slump, these bandits are getting more creative and more brazen. There have even been stories about brass plaques being stolen from graveyards and turned in for the scrap value. With this being said, it is quite obvious that nothing is sacred in the world of scrap metal.

The predominant theft that we in the landscape industry are dealing with is "backflow prevention devices". These devices help keep any contaminants from siphoning back into the drinking water and supply and are a mandatory item on all Homeowners Associations, Commercial Properties and depending on where you live even some houses. They are constructed of brass and copper and depending on the size, can weigh in excess of 60 pounds. This makes them a desirable target for would be thieves. Theft of backflows has been going on for decades, however, there has been a dramatic increase in the last 2 years as the value of brass and copper increases. A thief may get \$60 or \$80 per backflow preventer which you will pay up to \$2,000.00 to replace. Generally, these crooks work in the dead of night when most people are sleeping. It only takes a few minutes to turn off the water meter and wrench apart the backflow taking whatever they can get. A lot of properties have multiple backflows which allows a skilled team to steal several hundred dollars in scrap metal in very little time. I personally have a property where the manager was contacted by a man posing as an employee of the local water department. He explained that they would be performing some temporary shutdowns while they did some testing, but the water would only be off for a few minutes. It wasn't until a few hours later that it was discovered that the backflows had been stolen.

So the question is, what can we do to protect ourselves from theft? Here are a couple of strategies which will help you in making your property less of a target.

There are numerous companies who now manufacture backflow enclosures. These are steel, aluminum or plastic enclosures which hide and protect your backflow via a padlock system. Most landscape contractors as well as plumbing services can install these items. The costs vary dependant on the type of enclosure and the labor necessary to install it.

Secondly, many people have taken to painting their backflows with an epoxy paint. The theory is that scrap yards pay far less for contaminated metal thusly making them less valuable. You would definitely need to contact your water purveyor to make sure this is allowed in your area.

As I've heard it said, "locks only keep honest people honest". So diligence and a wary eye are your best defense against this ongoing problem.

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