

The Cost of Darkness: as the clocks go back, the value of stolen copper is the wrong number

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£2,000 of cable, £750,000 of repairs: research paper warns that sites are pricing metal theft by what is taken, not by what stops working

Organisations are pricing copper and cable theft against the wrong number, according to a new white paper from VPS, the largest European temporary security specialist.

The Cost of Darkness: when copper theft becomes business disruption finds that the value of the stolen metal is almost always the smallest cost in an incident. The paper's examples include:

- On the Core Valley Lines in South Wales, thieves cut cable with a scrap value of about £2,000. Two earlier thefts on the same network in a single week stopped all passenger services and cost more than £750,000 in repairs, before any delay costs were counted.
- In East Kent, a man posing as a maintenance worker took copper earthing strips from substations, and local businesses lost more than £220,000. They did not own the substations.
- The copper in a rapid EV charging cable is worth perhaps £25. Replacing the cable costs the operator around £1,000.

The paper is written for the people who look after these sites: estate, facilities, security, risk and insurance leaders. It urges them to judge each site by what stops working if the metal goes, rather than by what a thief could carry away.

It also warns that the clocks going back on 25 October changes the risk in particular ways:

- **Fewer intruders, more targeted thefts.** VPS data shows property breaches fall by around 40% between September and November, while burglary and theft in its crime intelligence data rise by more than half between October and December. The pattern has held for two consecutive years.
- **More callouts needing someone on site.** In the month after the clocks went back in 2025, VPS callouts to alarms rose by about a third, around four times the rise in alarm activations.

Criminologist Dr Janice Goldstraw-White of Perpetuity Research, who contributed to the paper, describes how easily organised thieves can blend in: "They literally just put their yellow jackets on and go up and down the country connecting it. They know what they're doing."

José Rosa, Director of Insight Solutions at VPS, said: "When the nights draw in, the casual trespassers mostly disappear. The people who are left have usually come for something specific. The sites most at risk are the ones where something important stops working when the metal goes: earthing, back-up generators, signalling. That's where protection should go first."

The paper sets out practical steps, including checking for the warning signs, protecting the assets that matter most when they fail, and planning for the return visit. VPS will discuss the findings at a webinar, in November.

The Cost of Darkness can be downloaded at <https://www.vpsgroup.com/the-cost-of-darkness/>

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