

London Diocesan Advisory Committee



HOW TO DEAL WITH THEFT OF METAL FROM YOUR CHURCH

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1. INTRODUCTION

(a) Theft of metal from church buildings is not new. The material most frequently stolen is lead though other metals, such as copper, are also at risk. Church roofs, guttering and lightning conductors are parts of the building most commonly affected.

(b) There has been a notable increase in the incidence of such thefts in recent years, due to the rising value of these materials. This has led to a significant rise in claims from insurance companies. It is not just the cost of replacing these materials that is a problem; their removal can result in water penetration of the building, leading to costly repair works.

(c) This paper outlines some of the security measures you may wish to put in place, advises on what to do in the event of theft and discusses the options available when replacing stolen materials.

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2. SECURITY MEASURES

(a) There is a wide range of different actions that can be taken to deter thieves. The costs associated with these range from a bit of hard work to several thousands of pounds. It should be borne in mind that the cost of

suffering metal theft is itself likely to be several thousand, or tens of thousands of pounds, only a proportion of which may be covered by insurance.

(b) Smartwater is a forensic labelling system, using a unique indelible chemical code to identify property. From July 2011 Ecclesiastical will withdraw all cover for metal theft where Smartwater has not been applied. All churches insured with Ecclesiastical have been offered Smartwater. The Diocese's gutter maintenance team are trained in its application. It is important that you register the application with Smartwater. This incurs a fee, but without it there will be no protection, since the Police will not be able to identify it with your church building.

(c) Keep an eye on the church and inform your area policing team and other nearby churches of any suspicious activities.

(d) Carry out regular checks of the church building. It is particularly important to check those areas not easily visible from ground level, if safe access can be provided. Inaccessible areas can be inspected by the Diocesan Gutter Maintenance team. If you are not yet a member of the scheme please do enquire about joining it (web link at the end of this document). Otherwise, it may not be until water starts penetrating the building that you find out some of your roof covering has been removed.

(e) Consider removal of vegetation which impedes surveillance of an area. Works to trees may require consent from your local authority and/or a faculty.

(f) Ensure that ladders, wheelbarrows, wheelie bins and any other means of transporting stolen goods are safely stored away when not in use.

(g) Restrict vehicular access into the churchyard, particularly at night, to prevent burglars from having an easy getaway.

(h) Consider applying anti-climb paint to drainpipes and roof guttering. Anti-climb paint should only be used over a height of 2 metres and a warning notice should be put up indicating that anti-climb paint has been applied. Anti-climb is very sticky and is difficult to remove from hands or clothing. It is important that you seek professional advice before its application. Discuss with your Quinquennial Inspector (QI) first.

(i) Protect the lower level of lightning conductors by encasing them in a sheath making removal more difficult.

(j) When renewing a lead roof covering consider improving the method of fixing the lead sheet to the roof. For example, hollow rolls of lead with copper clips are harder to take apart than some other forms of fixing.

There are a number of proprietary systems on the market, including one being trialled by English Heritage called *LedLok*.

(k) Introduce security lighting, particularly in vulnerable areas, and ensure that regular checks are carried out to ensure that it is working properly. Lights need to be disposed carefully so as to avoid pools of darkness. Equally there is no point illuminating an area which can't be viewed easily from a public place – you might simply make the thief's task easier by illuminating his work.

(l) Closed circuit television can act as both evidence for prosecution and also as a deterrent. Depending on the vehicular access to your church building, it may be effective simply to install a camera monitoring all traffic, provided its presence is effectively advertised. More complex systems involving motion detectors and cameras mounted on the church roof would be considerably more expensive to install.

(m) Install intruder alarm protection of external roof areas using appropriate infra-red beam or vibration detectors, preferably with an automatic transmission of alarm signals to a 24-hour manned alarm receiving centre. These can also be linked to sirens and other sounding devices on site. A decoy alarm box in an obvious position may prove a useful deterrent.

(n) Having reviewed all possible security measures you should discuss them with your Quinquennial Inspector and Archdeacon to assess the impact they will have on the church building and any consents that may be required.

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3. ACTION IN THE EVENT OF METAL BEING STOLEN

(a) You should first of all contact 0300 123 1212 and report the crime to the Metropolitan Police, or alternatively dial 999 if a theft is actually taking place.

(b) After this has been done, contact the following:

- Your Insurance Company
- Your Quinquennial Inspector (QI)
- Your Archdeacon
- The Diocese of London's Care of Churches Team (020) 7932 1230
- English Heritage (if your church has in the recent past been the subject of funding from the EH/HLF Repairs to Places of Worship scheme).

(c) In order to protect the timber structures of the roof and the contents of the church, and thereby prevent additional repairs and expense, it is important that the roof is made watertight as soon as possible. In many cases this will be easily achieved with polythene sheeting or felt. Where a temporary solution is not effective the situation must be made clear to your insurer and the Care of Churches Team quickly so that a permanent proposal can be agreed as soon as possible.

(d) Accepted practice is to replace the material stolen in a like-for-like fashion, particularly if it is high-performing, such as lead or copper. This also often helps to retain the historic and architectural character of a building, which is a significant consideration if it is listed.

(e) However, if the security measures recommended in [Section 1](#) have not proved a deterrent and the threat of theft remains high, you may wish to consider replacement in other materials, such as terne-coated stainless steel (stainless steel with a surface finish similar in appearance to lead) or zinc. These materials have less saleable value and are therefore less likely to be stolen. However, this advantage should be balanced up against the fact that they will not match the durability of a high-performance material such as lead.

(f) As an alternative to other long-term metal roof coverings like zinc and steel, it may be preferred to carry out a medium-term temporary repair using a high-performance roofing felt, with a view to replacing this covering at the end of its life (10-15 years) with the original. It must be emphasized that felt will not perform as well as traditional roof coverings and it is vital that it is inspected regularly to ensure it is not allowing water ingress or encouraging condensation.

(g) Such inspections could be carried out during gutter maintenance and certainly at the Quinquennial Inspection. There is a wide variety of substitute materials on the market whose performance is not well known in the medium term. PCCs and their professional advisors are encouraged to report their experiences in this regard to the Care of Churches Team which is maintaining a list of locations, materials and performance.

(h) Metal theft from churches is not a victimless crime, yet it does not appear to be a priority for the police. In the wake of an incident of metal theft, the PCC might like to consider writing a Heritage Crime Impact Statement. These documents are being promoted by English Heritage as a means of highlighting the true cost, both financial and emotional, to churches suffering from such crimes. They can be used by courts to set appropriate levels of sentencing.

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4. OBTAINING PERMISSION FOR REPAIR WORKS

(a) If the repair works to be carried out are like-for-like and cost under £10,000 excluding VAT and scaffolding, you do not need a faculty. You should seek the written permission of your Archdeacon before the contract to carry out the works is signed if the cost is between £5,000 and £10,000.

(b) If the works cost over this amount and/or the work proposed is not like-for-like you will need to obtain a faculty. If the repairs are urgent (e.g. to stop water coming through the roof) you will be able to obtain emergency consent. To do this, you will need to contact the Diocesan Registry outlining the problem and the proposed solution, copying in the Care of Churches Team and your Archdeacon.

(c) If you are not proposing to carry out a like-for-like repair but are intending to use an alternative material (see [Section 3\(e-g\)](#) above) it is likely that the Chancellor will wish to hear the views of the Diocesan Advisory Committee before making his decision. If your building is listed, the views of English Heritage, your local planning authority and the relevant amenity society will also need to be sought. In this circumstance a temporary roof covering may be necessary.

(d) If you are installing new security lighting, CCTV cameras or an alarm system a faculty will be required. Speak to your QI, Archdeacon, the Care of Churches Team and your insurance company about any such proposal.

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Relevant links

<http://www.ecclesiastical.com/churchmatters/index.aspx>

<http://www.smartwater.com/home.aspx>

<http://www.london.anglican.org/Gutters>

<http://www.churchcare.co.uk/building.php?CDOD> (including Heritage Crime Impact Statements)

Care of Churches Team

Diocese of London

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