

Scrap Metal Dealers Bill passes final reading – could this halt the rise in metal theft on empty properties?

Submitted by: Perfectly Picked

Friday, 15 February 2013

VPS welcomes the final reading of a Bill that could help curtail the 1000 metal thefts that occur every week in the UK

VPS, responsible for managing over 90,000 vacant properties in the UK and abroad, has welcomed the final stage of the Scrap Metal Dealers Bill through the House of Lords on Tuesday February 12th.

On the same evening the BBC screened a special documentary 'The Hunt for Britain's Metal Thieves' stating: 'The high price of metal has led organised criminal gangs to tear apart Britain's infrastructure, stripping metal from railways, power stations, churches and even war memorials'.

"For some time we've been highlighting to owners of empty premises about the risks and costs to businesses from the rising trend of metal theft, commenting only a fortnight ago on the Home Office's latest Crime against businesses survey, which reported 67,000 of these crimes took place last year." said Simon Alderson, Commercial Director of VPS. "As a trade, scrap metal dealers themselves have often have been victims of these crimes, but the Bill has come about because some dealers are willing to pay cash for scrap metal offered to them by anyone."

"The Government amended the 1964 Act to prohibit cash payments to purchase scrap metal last October, but this new Bill goes much further by not only making it illegal to take cash but it also requires all sellers of metal to provide verifiable ID at point of sale and the onus is on the dealers to record and retain records of each purchase." Mr Alderson explained.

Richard Ottoway, MP for Croydon South, first brought the private members bill to Parliament in June last year, and it has made fairly rapid progress since then. Without any further amendments this week, the Scrap Metal Dealers Bill is ready to be given the Royal Assent and become law, probably before Easter.

Mr Alderson also stressed that "It is too early to say how much impact these new powers will have on metal theft. The prevalence of metal theft is closely tied to the price of metals on international markets, which is expected to rise until at least 2015. We are closely monitoring the number of thefts reported in the press and to date, this crime remains a significant issue. Given the cost of repairs to damage caused by metal thieves, it is a clear case of 'prevention is better than the cure'."

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Notes for editors:

About VPS:

VPS secure more than 90,000 properties and employ over 2000 staff in over 100 locations across the UK, the US, and mainland Europe. They specialise in securing, maintaining and managing vacant property across a wide range of customer and industry sectors.

Core building services cover the vacant, unoccupied and void property lifecycle from an initial risk assessment, to security, including guarding, monitoring, clearing, cleaning, maintenance and preparation. These services protect properties against unauthorised access and a variety of hazards such as arson, theft, squatting and unauthorised occupation.

More About Metal Theft:

A fortnight after one of the most prolific gangs of metal thieves have been jailed for stealing over £700,000 of metal and cabling (1) , the Government recognises that metal theft is becoming an increasingly high-profile problem (House of Commons Library (2)). The Association of Chief Police Officers has estimated that metal theft costs the UK economy approximately £770 million per year, with other sources estimating that additional costs not included in that data, together with unreported crimes pushes that figure to over £1 billion. The British Transport Police, which has lead policing responsibility for metal theft, experienced 2,000 incidents in 2010/11 compared with approximately 1,500 in 2009/10. It says that the prevalence of metal theft is closely tied to the price of metals on international markets, which is expected to rise until at least 2015.

Special regulations have applied to scrap metal dealers since at least the late 1800s in order to help tackle the theft of metal. The current legislation is set out in the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 1964, which places specific controls on scrap metal dealers such as a requirement to register with the local authority.

On 26 January 2012, the Home Secretary Theresa May announced that the Government would be legislating to amend the 1964 Act to prohibit cash payments to purchase scrap metal and to significantly increase the fines for all relevant offences under the Act. These changes have been legislated for in sections 145 to 147 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

The Government subsequently produced a Hand-out Bill setting out proposals to repeal the 1964 Act altogether and replace it with a new regime to regulate the scrap metal trade. This has been taken up by Richard Ottaway, who has taken it through the House of Commons as the Scrap Metal Dealers Bill 2012-13. Key features of the Bill include giving local authorities the power to revoke and vary scrap metal dealer licences, requiring sellers of metal to provide personal identification at the point of sale, re-enacting and extending the cash payments ban legislated for in the 2012 Act, and giving the police and local authorities new powers to enter and inspect sites.

(1)

<http://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/cable-theft-gang-who-crippled-huge-sections-of-britains-railways-in-700000-spree-are-j>
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(2) Metal Theft, House of Commons Library Standard Note Published 11 July 2012|Standard notes SN06150

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Hi-res photos available upon request.