

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Theft of Copper Parts at Remote Well Sites

In recent years the resale value of copper has significantly increased. This situation has led to increased theft of copper wiring and other components. Since copper can be found inside pumping motors or other well site equipment, the remote locations of well sites has made them an increasing target for theft. Organizations should be aware of this trend so that they can take preventative measures.

Some general precautionary measures that may be taken include:

Physically Securing the Well Site

Provide **full security fencing** around “open” as well as enclosed well sites. Well pumping equipment kept in an enclosed hut should have solid *security locking* systems.

For both fencing and door locks, keys need to be controlled, maintained, documented, and monitored by management

Providing Security Systems at Well Sites

- *Electronic security systems* should be used to mitigate theft exposure.
Contact and motion alarms are effective security measures. For enclosed well pumping locations, both should be used. Since these are remote sites with little potential outside observation, a thief could find a way to break in through a roof vent or other opening and bypass the door’s contact alarm system. An internal motion system will serve as an effective backup.

“Open” well sites enclosed by security fencing can be supplemented with yard motion detection systems. These systems are effective in detecting thieves, but are designed not to react to rodents or other small animals.
- *Alarms*
Alarms should be connected to a central station alarm company or a constantly attended district facility. Suitable security procedures should be in place to immediately respond to these occurrences. If using employees is not a safe approach, an agreement with a security contract service can be used. If alarms are SCADA-monitored, any triggered alarm must be interpreted as a security alarm, and procedures should be in place to enable a quick response.
- *Security Cameras*
Cameras can be used to record and monitor well sites. When used in conjunction with other security systems and response approaches, cameras can be effective. Radio-transmitted units should be used so

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the data is immediately transferred to a secure location. This will prevent loss of data by a tampering thief.

Controlling Employee and Contractor Access

- *In-house Staff*

Most organizations conduct security background checks on employees at the time they are hired. If this is not being done, it is advisable to develop such a plan to reduce possible problem employees.

- *Contractors (with access to well sites)*

The main contact at a repair service may be a fine, upstanding person. However, other people on staff may not be. These risky contract personnel may have knowledge of specific equipment and access to well sites.

One helpful approach would be to have an agreement with contractors to conduct security background checks on employees. Then prohibit any “questionable” people from getting anywhere near a well site (or other area). If a contractor resists this approach, management should consider discontinuing their services.

- *Access Key Controls*

Whether they are used by in-house or contract staff, access keys need strict monitoring and oversight for security purposes. When keys are given out, a security evaluation of the person receiving the keys should be performed. Management should document and retain this analysis.

Well Site Theft Investigation

After a well site copper (or other) theft/break-in occurrence, a full management investigation should be conducted and documented. If the culprit cannot be identified, additional security measures should be seriously considered. An outside security firm can also be consulted to help address the issue.

Conclusion

As long as the resale price of copper and other well site components remains high, theft will be a serious ongoing exposure. Successful thefts will encourage increased similar problems.

Essentially, reducing the potential for theft will require a significant management commitment. It will also probably necessitate budgetary, management, procedural, personnel, and equipment adjustments. However, management should strongly consider upgrading security measures to successfully reduce this exposure.

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