

# Preventing Copper Theft at Your Church

COPPER THEFT CONTINUES TO RISE ACROSS THE UNITED STATES AS COPPER PRICES AND DEMAND INCREASE. CHURCHES—OFTEN UNOCCUPIED FOR LONG PERIODS—REMAIN COMMON TARGETS FOR THIEVES SEEKING QUICK SCRAP VALUE.

## The Rising Cost of Copper Theft

The Insurance Information Institute (III) estimated in 2023 that U.S. utilities lose \$920 million annually due to copper theft, highlighting the significant financial impact nationwide. Law-enforcement data shows the problem continues to escalate, with the FBI reporting a 38% increase in copper-theft cases from 2021 to 2022, indicating a growing trend in metal-related crime. This surge has been intensified by record-high copper prices in 2025, driven by tariffs and supply shortages, which pushed prices above \$5.60 per pound and contributed to a nationwide spike in thefts targeting HVAC systems, commercial buildings, and other exposed infrastructure.

Because the resale value is high and traceability is low, thieves often destroy expensive HVAC units for only a small amount of copper, damage that can easily exceed thousands of dollars.

## How Copper Theft Impacts Churches

Churches hit by copper theft often face loss of heating, cooling, water, or electricity, along with expensive HVAC repairs or full system replacements that can strain already limited budgets. These incidents can also lead to business interruptions, such as event cancellations or unplanned closures, disrupting ministry operations. In addition, copper theft creates significant safety hazards, such as exposed wiring and refrigerant leaks, which can pose risks to staff, volunteers, and visitors. Replacing a vandalized air-conditioning unit can cost thousands of dollars, far exceeding the minimal scrap value thieves typically gain, making prevention essential.

### Quick Prevention Checklist

- Lighting installed around units
- Landscaping trimmed for visibility
- Security cameras with motion alerts
- Audible alarms on HVAC equipment
- Copper painted/tinned
- Copper engraved/marked
- HVAC cages & tamper-resistant screws installed



## How to Protect Your Church

- 1. Improve Lighting**
  - Install **motion-activated lighting** around HVAC units and utility areas. Thieves avoid well-lit spaces.
- 2. Keep Landscaping Trimmed**
  - Keep shrubs, trees, and brush **away from HVAC units and copper piping**. Good visibility reduces hiding places.
- 3. Increase Surveillance**
  - Upgrade to **motion-sensitive security cameras**; many systems provide real-time alerts.
  - Cameras often pay for themselves compared to the cost of an insurance deductible.
- 4. Add Audible Alarms**
  - Install **refrigerant-pressure loss alarms** or **movement-triggered AC alarms**. Some units start around \$200 and can deter thieves instantly.
- 5. Paint or Tin Copper**
  - Paint or tin exposed copper so it becomes **nearly worthless to scrap dealers**. Thieves often avoid visibly treated copper.
- 6. Engrave Your Copper**
  - Engrave your church name and address—or **“STOLEN – DO NOT RECYCLE.”** Marked copper increases the risk for thieves.
- 7. Secure HVAC Units**
  - Install **theft-deterrent cages** that fit tightly around HVAC systems.
  - Replace standard screws with **tamper-resistant fasteners** (often under \$100).