



KANAWHA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

*LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION
301 VIRGINIA STREET EAST
CHARLESTON, WV. 25301
304-357-0169*

Sheriff Michael Y. Rutherford
Chief Deputy Joseph H. Crawford

NEWS / MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

December 20, 2023.

Contact: Sergeant Joshua L. Lester
joshualester@kcsso.us
Phone: 304.357.0732 office
681.910.3649 cell

Copper Cable Theft and Illegal Scrapping

Update 12/20/2023: Kanawha County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Joe Crawford held a press conference this afternoon regarding a multi-jurisdictional investigation into illegal copper cable theft and illegal scrapping of that cable at local scrapyards.

Chief Crawford says the Kanawha County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigative Section has been leading the investigation in Kanawha County, but the success of this investigation comes from the involvement of many law enforcement officials in Kanawha and our surrounding counties. Law enforcement was not alone though as we received an abundance of cooperation from Frontier Communications as well as other government agencies and businesses that have been repeatedly impacted by these criminal acts.

The Kanawha County Sheriff's Office has taken more than three dozen complaints this year related to the theft or destruction of public utility cable and our investigation uncovered a similar impact in surrounding counties, cities, and towns.

Copper telecommunications cable, commonly referred to as "copper wire" is only used in the utility industry making it highly sought after. Recycling companies are paying large sums of money for the cable which makes it lucrative to thieves.

Frontier Communications being among the greatest impacted says the theft and damage occurring across our region from these malicious acts, not only costs thousands of dollars in replacing lines and repairing service outages but also weakens our infrastructure.

Damaged and stolen telecommunications cables typically result in citizens enduring lengthy periods without critical services such as phone and internet which may be crucial during an emergency. Businesses suffer as day-to-day operations become difficult or impossible and with recycling companies



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accepting and paying cash to individuals who are often troubled and looking to make a “quick buck”, it only encourages more participation in criminal activity.

Our deputies at Kanawha County along with many other officers and investigators have worked together to conduct hours of surveillance, followed up on tips and leads given by our citizens, and made countless traffic stops on suspicious or known vehicles engaging in this activity.

Multiple offenders have been identified and interviewed for their involvement in this criminal operation. We have learned that many offenders are tied together and working to commit these crimes not only in Kanawha County but across our region's surrounding counties (Boone, Roane, Putnam, Jackson, and Fayette.)

Drug addiction and substance abuse continue to be a concern as many of the suspects involved in this investigation admitted to risking their lives and the safety of others by engaging in this illegal activity to support their addictions. Recycling companies who accept this stolen cable are providing an easy means for substance abusers to obtain money with total disregard for the effects the entire operation has on our communities.

On December 11, 2023, enough information had been gathered by investigators to obtain search warrants at Freedom Recycling (Charleston, WV) and London Recycling (London, WV). During the execution of the search warrants, officers recovered approximately 2 tons of telecommunication cable from the companies and other individuals who arrived with intentions of scrapping recently acquired cable. Detectives continued to recover more cable this week while identifying additional offenders.

This investigation now has the attention of the West Virginia Secretary of State who is working to help end these poor business practices from recycling companies. Moving forward, we are continuing to work with Frontier Communications as well as our law enforcement partners across the region to ensure we locate as many players in this operation as possible.



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The Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney's Office has been involved with this investigation and will begin seeking indictments at the beginning of next year. We plan to work together with prosecutors to send a strong message that these criminal attacks against our infrastructure, attacks against our citizens, and attacks against our businesses will not be tolerated in Kanawha County, and those who choose to participate in these types of illegal activity will face criminal proceedings that could include jail time.



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(Original Release)

Press Conference / Multi-jurisdictional Investigation

Charleston, WV- A press conference will be held at the Kanawha County Sheriff's Office on Wednesday, December 20, 2023, at 3:00 p.m., regarding a multi-jurisdictional investigation into recent thefts and scrapping of telecommunications cable.

Chief Deputy Joe Crawford will talk about the Kanawha County Sheriff's Office's joint efforts with multiple surrounding agencies that have put in an abundance of man-hours into combatting copper cable theft and illegal scrapping operations.

Illegal copper theft and scrapping of stolen copper cables have plagued our communities by costing taxpayers and corporations thousands of dollars in utility repairs and restoration of critical services. This investigation has uncovered multiple criminal offenders and business enterprises that we believe have worked in conjunction with one another across our local cities, towns, and bordering counties.

We look forward to sharing the details of this multi-jurisdictional investigation as we prepare with the Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney's Office to begin filing criminal indictments at the beginning of next year.

Joining Chief Joe Crawford will be our law enforcement colleagues from the Putnam County Sheriff's Office, Boone County Sheriff's Office, Jackson County Sheriff's Office, Roane County Sheriff's Office, Fayette County Sheriff's Office, Charleston Police Department, South Charleston Police Department, Saint Albans Police Department, and the West Virginia State Police. Additionally, we welcome representatives of the Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, West Virginia Secretary of State Office, Frontier Communications, and other government agencies who have all been working together with us on this investigation.



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