Man Killed While Attempting To Steal Copper
News
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Posted on : 2013/6/8 14:06:39

A man in his mid-20s has died in south Wichita after apparently electrocuting himself while climbing a utility pole with a bolt cutter and coming into contact with a live wire, a police official said Friday.

Westar Energy spokesman Nick Bundy, who spoke to reporters at the scene after the manâ□□s body was found, said, â□□Weâ□□ve been worried that something like this was going to happen.â□□

Copper theft, even from high-voltage utility equipment, has spiked since last year, Bundy said. The top line on the utility pole where the man was found Friday carries 7,200 volts, Bundy said.

â□□Our biggest point is these thieves are putting their lives at risk for a couple dollars of copper,â□□ he said. The copper comes from electrical wire that is stripped and sold for scrap.

Police Lt. Dennis Wilson gave this account: About 2:10 p.m. Friday, a person on a bike path near the 2200 block of South Minnesota, south of Mt. Vernon and I-135, saw a man lying near a utility pole. The man had apparently leaned his bike against the pole, using it to stand on, and then climbed up 10 to 12 feet, high enough to come into contact with a live wire that electrocuted him. Bolt cutters were found nearby.

The utility pole is in an area of boarded-up apartment buildings.

The man appeared to have been lying on the ground since overnight and to have been killed instantly, Wilson said.

Crews found two wires hanging from the pole.

Wilson noted the increase in copper theft, adding, â□□This may be something he was trying to do. Unfortunately, he was electrocuted.â□□

Police have identified the man but were not releasing his name.

Bundy, the Westar spokesman, said after Fridayâ□□s grim discovery: â□□The thieves are getting braver.â□□ He cited an incident about a month ago in which someone stole copper from a Westar substation near Pawnee and Rock. The theft involved such high-voltage equipment that the company expected to find a body at the site but didnâ□□t. The pilfering caused an outage at McConnell Air Force Base and for about 2,000 residential customers around 4:30 a.m., Bundy said.

The death discovered Friday should serve as a warning to those who might be tempted to cut wire to be sold for scrap, he said.

It also poses a hazard for utility crews and the public, especially when someone removes a ground

wire, he said.