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Monday, June 23, 2008

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Metal Theft Bill Heads to Senate

California Political Desk

May 09, 2008

SACRAMENTO –Assemblyman John J. Benoit (R-Bermuda Dunes) today announced the California State Assembly’s unanimous approval, by a vote of 65-0, of Assembly Bill 2724, his measure to crack down on the metal thieves who continue to ravish public and private property in our communities and throughout the State of California.

"My colleagues recognize that we need to act now to enact tougher laws to combat the metal theft epidemic," remarked Assemblyman Benoit. "I'm grateful for their consideration of my measure that will curb this crime which is threatening local governments, hurting school districts, and destroying critical infrastructure locally and throughout our State."

Under current law, it is considered grand theft if an individual steals an amount of metal valued at over \$400. Benoit’s bill would impose a fine, in addition to current penalties, of \$100 for first-time offenders and \$200 for repeat offenders. The fine revenue collected will be retained by the local community to increase the enforcement of our metal theft laws.

Metal theft has grown in recent years to become a major problem plaguing individuals, school districts, water districts, and other local governments. With the rising price of precious metals, such as copper,

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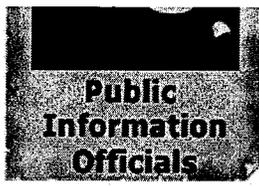
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thieves have stolen pieces of public and private infrastructure and have harvested the scrap metal into recycling centers to make quick cash.



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According to information obtained by the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, in 2007, there were just over 1,000 crimes involving metal theft reported in the county, which resulted in the theft of \$2.6 million dollars worth of metal being harvested. In neighboring San Bernardino County, metal theft has soared to account for one-

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third of property crimes, rising from an average of two incidents per month seven years ago to ten thefts per week.

AB 2724 is being sponsored by the County of Riverside, and supported by a diverse coalition of law enforcement and local governments, including the Association of California Water Agencies, the California Farm Bureau Federation, California Peace Officers' Association, California Police Chiefs Association, California Special Districts Association, the Eastern Municipal Water District, the Western Municipal Water District, and the Southern California Public Power Authority. AB 2724 now awaits consideration by the Senate Public Safety Committee.

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