

Thieves are again targeting AC/heating units in county

Written by Marty Randall

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The trend to steal parts or whole climate control units from local businesses and county churches is again growing steadily in Scott County.

“We are watching the more remote country churches and other buildings as best we can, but our deputies and reserves can only be in so many places. Thieves know this, so the air conditioning and heat pump units are again being 'hit' around the county,” advised Sheriff John Lizenby.

Several homes, businesses and churches have fallen victim to unscrupulous criminals who normally tear apart the units and take the relatively small quantities of copper coil out of them. Now, the Sheriff's Department has added the old Zimmerman building at State Road 356 and U.S. Highway 31 South and Emmanuel Baptist Church to its list of latest sites of such thefts. Noted Sheriff Lizenby, “Sometimes, the amount of work that went into the theft was probably worth more than what these people can get selling the copper as salvage. It's amazing they'd invest that much effort.”

At the old Zimmerman building, which had lately housed a truck driving school, a new church has been established. The congregation noticed how cold the building was when they gathered for worship. The unit on the structure's roof had been broken into.

A roof unit at Johnson Elementary School was similarly vandalized and parts taken.

As reports have been called into the Sheriff's Department, patrols have been stepped up, particularly after dark and at times when no one is normally around structures, leaving them vulnerable to thieves.

Sheriff Lizenby issued the warning that remotely-located churches and commercial buildings should be protected by alarms and video security cameras. “The last suspect we caught and charged was a man whose forced entry into a church was recorded by a camera. There's nothing like a video tape to help authorities go after these people,” Lizenby stated.

Building owners and residents can protect their heat pumps and climate control units from theft by having them covered with protective steel cages or other devices as well. “We suggest that people start inquiring about video cameras, alarms or cages because, sooner or later, they have the likelihood of becoming victims, especially if the price of scrap metal increases,” the Sheriff said.

He also encouraged neighbors to “...become a little more suspicious if you seen an unfamiliar vehicle in your neighbor's driveway or driving around your area. We'd rather have the report than not have it because you never know where it might lead, and it could become very useful as we continue to investigate these thefts.”

Persons who would like to report incidents or who want tips on how to prevent such thefts may call the Sheriff's Department at 752-8400 or the department's 24-hour Tip Line at 752-7898.