

Protecting Telecommunications Infrastructure from Theft and Vandalism

TO NARUC STAFF SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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COMMUNICATIONS

Protecting our Nation's Communications Infrastructure is Vital

Disruptions to communications networks can harm:

- **Public Safety & Security:** Impacting emergency response systems, public safety organizations, and law enforcement.
- **Economic Stability and Growth:** These networks support businesses, government operations, and financial services. Interruptions can lead to economic losses and affect critical functions.
- **Health Services:** Healthcare facilities rely on communications networks for patient care, medical records, and telemedicine. Reliable infrastructure is key for healthcare delivery.
- **Educational Institutions:** Centers of learning depend on communications to improve accessibility, quality and efficiency of education at all levels.
- **Interconnected Sectors of the Economy:** Communications networks and the facilities they rely on intersect with other key segments of the nation's economy.
 - **Energy, Transportation and Finance** all rely on communications infrastructure for service delivery, management monitoring and operational control functions.

Service Providers & Consumers Now Vulnerable to Increasing Vandalism directed at Critical Communications Infrastructure

- As physical threats have increased for the nation's energy infrastructure, the communications industry has experienced a similar rise in vandalism incidents in rural, residential and commercial areas across the country.
- Common targets for vandalism include aerial fiber lines, equipment boxes.
- Any physical impact to the network of this type has the potential to result in significant customer impacts – from hours to even days, depending on the nature of the damage.



Tool likely used to cut through aerial lines (144-count and 150-count).
Encino, CA
June 2024



Underground vault and two risers accessed; cuts made to 3 fiber lines.
Santa Clarita, CA
May 2024



Why are Vandalism incidents on the rise?

- Aerial and underground front easement lines (plant) and ground equipment ***can be vulnerable targets for criminals in search of copper.***
 - Fiber lines can be mistaken for phone copper lines.
 - Power supply cabinets are often targets of battery theft, wire removal for scrap, and damages related to electric power theft.
 - An uptick in vandalism incidents targeting underground vaults has been observed.
- According to a recent DHS intelligence bulletin, Domestic Violent Extremists (DVEs) have increasingly expressed interest in targeting fiber optic cables to achieve their ideological goals.
 - DVEs have shared tactics online for targeting fiber cables, including the use of firearms, arson, and power tools.

**EXAMPLES OF
VANDALISM ON COMMUNICATIONS
INFRASTRUCTURE**

- **Method of damage:** Hack saw and wire cutters
- **Site Details:** Highway in commercial area
- <https://krcrtv.com/news/local/vandals-cut-internet-lines-leave-thousands-offline-in-redding-area>



- **Method of damage:** Bolt Cutter
- **Site Details:** Residential area



- **Method of damage:** Cut
- **Site Details:** Residential area



- **Method of damage:** Gunfire
- **Site Details:** Aerial fiber line located roadside.



More Can Be Done to Combat Vandalism:

- Need to **recognize and address the growing problem of vandalism** by independent actors that has an outside effect on our nation's critical communications networks.
- **Develop and expand partnerships** among industry, regulators and law enforcement, on the need to protect critical infrastructure and raise awareness of likely targets and sites.
- **Gather information and track patterns** that may help prevent future incidents.
- **Engage local law enforcement** to provide continued education on the types of vandalism affecting telecommunications infrastructure and increase patrols.
- **Need to create stronger enforcement tools to enable prosecution** of these costly offenses.
- **Increase penalties** for intentional damage to critical infrastructure, such as, recent laws passed in Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina.
- **Include communications facilities** when increasing the class or severity of crimes regarding damage to critical infrastructure.