

Thieves face DNA snare

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Sophisticated DNA technology is today being deployed by Pennine Housing to combat a rash of thefts.

Invisible paste has now been applied to all boilers and copper piping in the fight against both being plundered from empty homes across the area.

Thieves have hit a string of houses and flats in Halifax, Hebden Bridge, Elland, Sowerby Bridge and Brighouse.

Jonathan Howarth, Pennine empty properties co-ordinator, said: "It has reached epidemic proportions and we have had to take drastic action.

"Thefts from empty properties have escalated to the point where they are at five times the level of a few years ago."

As a result a DNA paste has now been applied to the boilers and copper piping in all properties which will now leave them with an invisible tag.

"It is a marker which can be scanned by the police to provide a permanent record.

"The paste is invisible to the naked eye and does not wash off - better still each application features the equivalent of a bar code.

"That means that any product stolen can be traced as having come from a specific property.

High costs of metals, particularly copper, and the current credit crunch are the background against which the problem has significantly worsened.

Over the past three months the total cost of repeated thefts has been in the order of £30,000.

"These are often houses and flats made ready for people to move into and it results in massive inconvenience for tenants," said Jonathan.

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A part of the Trans-Pennine Housing group

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“It delays the whole process and has a further serious impact through the loss of rent.”

Crime prevention officer Stephen Holderness of West Yorkshire police, said: “It’s excellent that the new system is being introduced by Pennine.

“We brought in DNA marking to an area of Todmorden where burglaries had gone through the roof - within six months the figures had reduced by 84%.

“A part of the process was making prisoners going through the cells aware of the process. The strength of the evidence resulted in guilty pleas every time.”

News desks: for further details contact Howard Keal, Pennine Housing communications manager, 01484 82 4331, or 01653 694546.