



Stealing Copper Can Be A Deadly Crime

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After a rash of attempted copper thefts, authorities want people to know the dangers from stealing copper are real.

One Siouxland family has come face to face with the deadly dangers that copper thieves can leave behind.

About four years ago Earl Thelander discovered somebody broke into a rental property he owned in Onawa, IA. He smelled gas, aired the house out for a while, and then plugged in an electric fan.

The house exploded with Thelander inside. He suffered horrible burns, which he died from.

It turns out somebody cut a gas pipe to steal a small amount of copper.

Almost four years later, the case remains unsolved.

"We lost the patriarch of our family, and we really wish to get some closure to it," said Brad Thelander, Earl's son.

Attempting to steal copper from any wiring, or a home is a dangerous.

"Most of the wiring is hooked into an electrical service of some sort, and those people going out to steal that don't know if that electrical service is hooked up, so they're testing the dangers of getting shocked, or electrocuted," said Monona County Sheriff Jeff Pratt.

In Thelander's case, a copper theft turned deadly.
The family has a standing \$5,000 reward for any information on the robbery.

"The house didn't look vacant. People had just moved out of the house within a few days, so someone knew that the house was going to be empty that night, so someone knows something. I can't believe it's taken this long for it to come out."

Thelander says the family's not looking to put someone behind bars as much as they are hoping to get closure.

Thelander says he hopes whoever robbed his father's rental home has truly changed and never tried to steal copper again.