

## City Council taking on scrap metal theft as permits considered

A city council committee Tuesday takes up new rules to fight metal theft. One of those proposed rules would be a first in Ohio – a background check and permit required of anyone who wants to sell scrap metal to a city scrap yard.

### The background

Cincinnati – like many communities – is grappling with growing problems associated with scrap metal theft.

Families and small business owners robbed of air conditioners, pipes, gutters. Building owners left with a devastating mess after their vacant property is haphazardly plundered. The wreck of emotions when the item carries sentimental value – like a cross or urn from a church or grave site.

In some communities, particularly those around scrap metal yards, pillaged properties add to neighborhood blight.

Thieves have even been stealing grounding plates – which keep away lightning strikes – around energy substations. Lightning can start a fire or blow out power.

Cincinnati Councilman Cecil Thomas has led

a task force and will introduce the new rules with Roxanne Qualls 2 p.m. today at City Hall. The exact language wasn't expected ready until the meeting, though Thomas has said changes will include:

- Having a background check conducted by the police department in order to buy a permit from City Hall to sell scrap metal at a Cincinnati junk yard.
- Requiring scrap yard owners to pay their customers with a check that can't be cashed for a few days, rather than cash and enter information on every item it receives into a national online database of stolen items called LeadsOnline.

### The victim

Todd Stegman says he knows more victims of scrap metal theft in Camp Washington than he can count. The co-owner of Osborne Coinage, a private coin mint in Camp Washington, Stegman has had air conditioners stripped from his business

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and from properties he owns in Carthage. In one house, thieves tore out all the plumbing. "There's been such abuse in the system," Stegman said. "You would hope there wouldn't need to be such regulation, but it seems to be necessary."

### The middle man

Earl Weber, co-owner of Garden Street Iron & Metal, a scrap yard near Osborne Coinage in Camp Washington, says he's sick of being blamed for this crime trend. He said he already asks for and records, a valid I.D. card, license plate number, thumb print and takes photos of each item. Lawyers for the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries Jeffrey McNealey and Kelly Johnson – who represent Weber and several other scrap yard owners – met with Qualls and Thomas Monday to ask them not to go forward with these rules. "We are here to help," McNealey said. "We have a lot of experience both locally, statewide and ... nationally on what works and what doesn't work." McNealey says the new rules will encourage thieves – and legal scrappers – to go to yards outside the city.

### The politicians

Thomas and Qualls believe the rules can prevent scrap metal theft. Individuals participating in such crimes are often drug or alcohol addicts and will stop if the promise of a quick fix is diminished, they say. Qualls – who calls illegal scrapping "a plague on the community" – doesn't think many of these scrappers will put the effort into hauling the metal outside the city limits. Council members say the cost of a

scrapping permit, if the full council eventually agrees to require one, will be based on how much the individual plans to scrap during a certain period of time.

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