Cable theft remains a significant problem to Network Rail. The most effective way of preventing live cable theft, is through deterrence – criminals need to fear being caught and prosecuted. The lack of traceable evidence has traditionally made it more difficult for the British Transport Police (BTP) to prosecute cable thieves. SmartWater has been working in an integrated partnership with Network Rail and BTP to bring traceability to live cable, accountability to thieves, and ultimately deterrence amongst criminals, harbouring incredible results. With the introduction of the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013, the UK’s railway network now has the most powerful deterrence to hardened criminals in Europe.

Dyan Crowther, route managing director for Network Rail, said:

“CABLE THEFT IS A SERIOUS OFFENCE AND CAUSES TREN MENDOUS DISRUPTION TO PAS SENGERS AND GREAT COST TO NETWORK RAIL. THE WORK OF SMARTWATER AND BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE IS ONE OF A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT METHODS WE ARE USING TO DEAL WITH CABLE THEFT. THIS ALSO INCLUDES BUILDING ON THE EFFECTIVE RECENT LOBBYING CARRIED OUT FOR LEGAL CHANGES REGARDING THE ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL OF SCRAP METAL.”

A widespread rollout of SmartWater on one of the UK’s key railway lines has delivered major reductions in cable theft. Working side by side with Network Rail, British Transport Police (BTP) and local police forces, the three year project on the London to North West (LNW) mainline has achieved a reduction in live cable thefts of 54.7 per cent. As a result of this crime prevention success, delay minutes on the LNW line have been slashed by 54.9 per cent.

Network Rail implemented, in full, SmartWater’s patented crime fighting strategy, including the use of forensic marking technology to provide traceability to trackside cable. The deployment of this technology, together with trackside covert operations has aided the arrest of over 50 individuals on suspicion of cable theft during the three year project.

Liam Sumpter, Area Director, Network Rail, said:

“Our collaboration with SmartWater has enabled us to identify cable theft risks and to respond quickly to emerging trends in order to implement proactive mitigation plans, particularly through tactical deployments. Together we have managed to prevent incidents and to shut down activity at hot-spot locations, spreading the deterrent message through a variety of methods whilst also delivering the most effective weapon for convictions – traceability.”

“DISRUPTION TO TRAIN SERVICES IN THE WEST MIDLANDS DUE TO CABLE THEFT IS REDUCING AND THAT IS GOOD NEWS FOR OUR OPERATORS AND OUR PASSENGERS.”

Liam Sumpter, Area Director, Network Rail
Theft of trackside cable on a key national rail route has been slashed since the introduction of an innovative strategy developed by SmartWater.

In stark contrast to other UK and European rail networks, where cable thefts continue to rise dramatically, thefts along the SmartWater protected London to North West (LNW) mainline have fallen over the duration of the project.

SmartWater has pointed to the strategic, intelligence-based use of its forensic marking technology as the reason behind this success, together with an ongoing partnership involving Network Rail, British Transport Police, Train Operating Companies and law-abiding scrap dealers, which is closing the net on metal thieves. This achievement represents the first sustained reduction in cable theft on a European rail line.

SmartWater marks trackside cable with a chemical signature that is identifiable by Police, whether it is found in the possession of thieves or later in scrap metal yards. The deployment of this technology is based on an intelligence-led, strategic approach to identify and track hotspot areas and influence criminal behaviour within those areas to generate a powerful deterrent.

Chief Executive of SmartWater, Phil Cleary, said: “Property marking as an isolated security measure has been disproven as a meaningful deterrent of crime. Instead, SmartWater uses its technology tactically, combining it with intelligence gathering, crime mapping and regular scrap dealer awareness visits to keep continual pressure on the criminal fraternity.”

Virgin Trains’ Chief Operating Officer, Chris Gibb, said: “Cable thefts are directly responsible for a significant number of delays to our service, which has a knock-on effect of causing major disruptions to customers.”

Chris Gibb, Virgin Trains’ Chief Operating Officer

“Virgin Trains is committed to working in partnership with Network Rail, British Transport Police, SmartWater and other train operators to keep up the pressure on cable thieves. We have also been lobbying the UK Government to make changes urgently to regulations and legislation to make it more difficult to dispose of stolen scrap copper, given the impact this is having on the economy.”

Virgin Trains’ Chief Operating Officer

“ANYTHING THAT HELPS TO ENSURE OUR TRAINS RUN ON TIME IS VERY WELCOME AND SO WE ARE NATURALLY DELIGHTED WITH THESE LATEST RESULTS.”

Four men have been sentenced for conspiracy to commit railway cable theft after forensic evidence provided by SmartWater linked them to multiple crimes across the West Midlands.

Admitting to more than 30 offences, the gang has been jailed for a combined 11 years, with individual sentences ranging from 19 months to three-and-a-half-years. Whilst passing sentence, the Judge described their crimes as “theft on an industrial scale”. Police officers recovered cutting tools consistent with the gang’s modus operandi during house raids. The tools were found to be marked with tiny flecks of SmartWater forensic solution that linked the gang to multiple railway cable thefts.

SmartWater forensic marking is used by Network Rail to protect vulnerable railway infrastructure along the London to North West (LNW) route. Though no stolen cable was recovered from the gang, British Transport Police discovered cutting tools marked with tiny fragments of SmartWater in their homes. Analysis identified the fragments as coming from Network Rail cable used across Nuneaton. This, together with association charts prepared by SmartWater analysts, outlined the extent of the conspiracy.

John Gowland (26) and Dominic Wallis (23) pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to steal railway cables. Accomplices Flame Redshaw (20) and John Brunozzi-Jones (22) pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit railway theft. The Judge outlined the extent of the conspiracy.

John Gowland (26) and Dominic Wallis (23) pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to steal railway cables. Accomplices Flame Redshaw (20) and John Brunozzi-Jones (22) pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit railway theft. The Judge outlined the extent of the conspiracy.

“THE EVIDENCE WHICH THIS PROVIDES HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT PART OF THIS CASE AND DEMONSTRATES THE SUCCESSES WE CAN HAVE THROUGH WORKING TOGETHER.”

Jo Kaye, Route Managing Director for Network Rail

Jo Kaye, Route Managing Director for Network Rail