Case Study: London Borough of Lambeth

In March 2012 a spate of high-profile metal thefts in the London Borough of Lambeth were deemed to be having a detrimental impact upon local communities. This led to the establishment of the Lambeth metal theft scrutiny commission, with a remit to investigate what actions the council and its partners could take to reduce the risks of metal theft and the associated insurance costs.

Mitigating Risk

In 2013, Lambeth’s Risk and Insurance Team assisted the scrutiny commission by risk-ranking 668 council buildings in order to identify those most at threat of metal theft. These included the council’s core office accommodation, schools, libraries, community buildings, commercial properties and some housing buildings.

The results identified the most vulnerable sites, allowing resources to be targeted at those locations. Guidance was then provided to the manager of each building, offering advice on a number of cost-effective (or zero cost) crime reduction methods to help mitigate risk. These included removing easy roof access, installing perimeter lighting, securely storing wheeled bins or other containers that could be used to transport stolen metal, and cutting vegetation/trees that could be used to screen criminal activity.

Deploying SmartWater®

Property marking was also identified as a relatively cost effective method of suppressing metal theft by acting as a deterrent. Therefore, at the end of November 2013, Lambeth’s Risk and Insurance Team partnered with SmartWater, and the 50 council buildings considered to be at the greatest risk were issued with SmartWater traceable liquids to mark their metal infrastructure.

The use of SmartWater was then extended to schools in the Borough, with a phased rollout seeing an initial 26 sites benefiting from the technology. In addition to protecting metals, SmartWater was also applied to ICT equipment and other items considered to be at high risk of theft. Phase 2 of the rollout is now underway, with 32 Lambeth schools currently using the technology. The staff and parents of pupils were also given the opportunity to purchase SmartWater for their own domestic use at a reduced cost.

Achieving Results

The benefits of this project have been extremely positive, with Lambeth Risk and Insurance Team reporting a significant reduction in insurance claims for metal theft. From a peak of 14 metal theft claims in 2011/12 costing £56,000, claims were more than halved in 2012/13 with pay outs reduced to £11,000. In 2013/14 there were just two claims and at the time of writing (Feb 15) there have been zero claims for metal theft across schools and council buildings, and zero claims for ICT equipment from schools during the 2014/15 financial year.

Testimonial

“Now that we have achieved these impressive results, we plan to overtly promote the initiative in order to raise awareness of the security measures that have been put in place. The project has also supported the council’s overall objective of making Lambeth a safe and secure Borough and demonstrates to Lambeth’s citizens that we are doing all we can to reduce crime.”

James Rimmington
Risk Manager, Risk and Insurance Services, London Borough of Lambeth