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Wayne County considering crackdown on metal scavengers

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DETROIT (AP) -- Scavengers have declared open season on every kind of metal in Wayne County, and county commissioners are considering ways to stop them.

A proposed county ordinance would require that scrap yards obtain \$500 licenses from the county, allow health inspections, erect fences and ban the purchase of municipal materials like manhole covers or street lights. Violations would be punishable by a \$500 fine or 90 days in jail.

Commissioner Ilona Varga proposed the ordinance after thieves stole several manhole covers in her Delray neighborhood in southwest Detroit.

"These junkyards ask no questions," Varga said. "Thieves are eating our money, and no one is doing anything about it. To a junkie, \$10 for a manhole cover is a (drug) fix."

State records show Wayne County has at least a dozen scrap yards. The yards collect everything from brass to zinc, then sell it to smelters that melt it down into new metals that are used to make cars and other products.

The problem extends beyond industrial areas. In recent months, thieves have stolen brass markers from a Novi cemetery, driven scrap trucks away from locked yards in Plymouth and Livonia and removed all of the copper from a defunct YMCA branch in Detroit.

Stealing is already illegal, but that doesn't appear to have stopped scavengers from collecting metal, legally or otherwise.

Gerald Alexander said he makes roughly \$30

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a day selling metal he has found to three dealers in southwest Detroit. He can get as little as \$3 or \$4 for a bucket of wires, or \$45 for a catalytic converter, an automobile part that contains platinum.

"The majority of it is (stolen), but times are tough," Alexander told The Detroit News for a Monday story. "It's not stealing. People just don't know what they've got."

Information from: The Detroit News,
<http://www.detnews.com>

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