

# Copper Robbers

**C**opper, aluminum and other nonferrous metals are increasingly in high demand as prices rise. Fetching about \$3.50 per pound, copper is particularly precious to thieves who are willing to risk their lives to get it. They remove wiring and piping from homes, utility properties and electrical lines, occasionally causing power outages, expensive repairs and, in some cases, electrocution. In 2008, utilities reported 13 death resulting from copper theft, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The cost of repairing damages from metal thieves directly affects ratepayers and far outweighs what the thieves themselves receive when they sell the stolen metal. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the damage from a theft of just \$100 in copper wire can cost a utility more than \$5,000 to repair.

Lawmakers have responded. Since January 2010, 18 legislatures have passed laws that increase penalties for metal theft, tighten dealer licensing, or specify identification and payment requirements for buyers and sellers. For example, Iowa now requires salvage dealers to maintain complete, accurate and legible records and receipts of salvaged material purchases. Virginia requires anyone buying secondhand metal to pay by check, if the sale exceeds \$1,000. Kansas requires all businesses that purchase regulated scrap metal to be registered. And Virginia requires dealers to obtain documentation that a seller lawfully possesses any metal being sold.

The Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries—a trade organization representing nearly 1,600 recyclers across the country—has developed a Web-based alert system ([ScrapTheftAlert.com](http://ScrapTheftAlert.com)) that allows subscribers to alert others of a metal theft. Subscribers within a 100-mile radius of where the theft occurred receive the alerts. This free tool is funded entirely by the scrap recycling industry and is available to states, law enforcement agencies and the public.

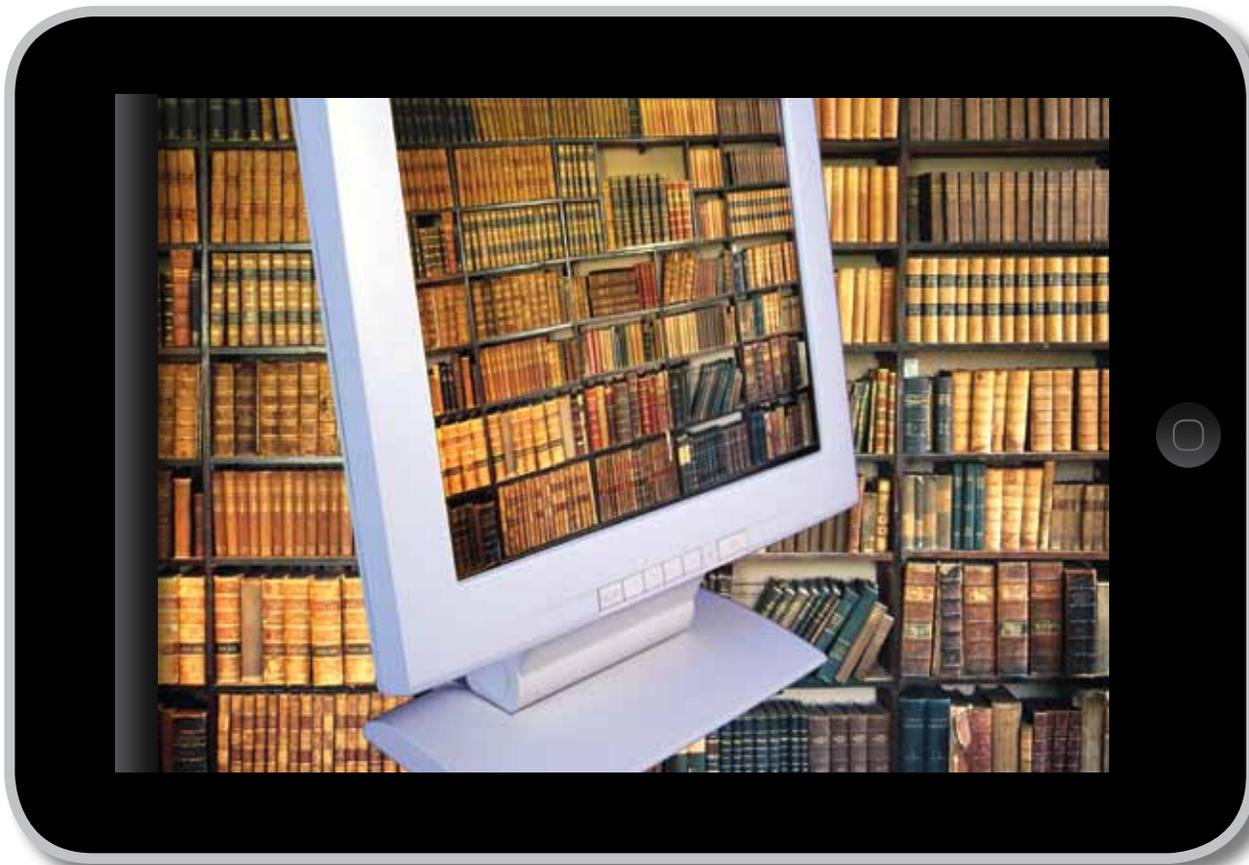
According to the scrap recycling institute, there are 12,066 registered users; a little less than a third are law enforcement officers. Since its launch in 2008, the database has issued almost 6,000 alerts.

In 2008, Michigan lawmakers enacted a law requiring the use of an alert system, which referenced this new tool as a means of compliance. Colorado enacted legislation last year that specifically requires the use of [ScrapTheftAlert.com](http://ScrapTheftAlert.com). Other states, such as Georgia and Minnesota, have developed their own alert systems, and several local jurisdictions also use alert systems.

—Jacquelyn Pless



# Private Reading



Long-established privacy laws in all 50 states protect the confidentiality of library circulation records. Federal and some state laws also prohibit video stores from disclosing a customer's personal information without permission. E-book purchases and records of books read or purchased online, however, are not yet similarly protected—except in California.

Lawmakers from the Golden State passed two bills last year that extend privacy protections to people who browse, read, check out or buy books online. The first law protects readers of online resources in libraries, including text messages, online chat, e-books and email ensuring that, “when we step into the library, virtually or otherwise, our privacy remains protected,” says the bill’s sponsor, Senator Joe Simitian.

“People use libraries to research sensitive and personal topics; their privacy shouldn’t be compromised,” Simitian says.

The other new law protects information about the books Californians browse, read or purchase from electronic services and online booksellers, who may have access to detailed information about readers, such as specific pages browsed.

Although California law already protected the records of library patrons, according to Senator Leland Yee, “California law was completely inadequate when it came to protecting one’s privacy for book purchases, especially for online shopping and electronic books.” Under the bill he sponsored, commercial entities are prohibited from disclosing personal information about readers without a court order.

Some legal analysts are concerned that the law’s definition of “book”—“paginated or similarly organized content ... of the type normally published in a volume or finite number of volumes”—may include blog posts or even websites that accept paid advertising. Independent booksellers also objected, saying the law will impose a burden on smaller businesses.

Independent booksellers also objected to the law, saying it imposed a burden on small businesses that could be held liable for releasing customer information.

This new legislation is just one more chapter in the effort to keep pace with the continuing and hard-to-define changes in technology.

—Pam Greenberg

# Too Soon to Die

**S**uicide is the second leading cause of death among Americans between the ages of 25 and 34 and is the third leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than 36,000 people in the United States committed suicide in 2008, and more than 660,000 showed up at emergency rooms for nonfatal, self-inflicted injuries. It is estimated that, with every suicide, there are at least 25 attempts.

Depression, mental illness, feelings of isolation or a family history of suicide can increase one's risk. Bolstering clinical care for mental, physical, and substance abuse disorders, and supporting community, cultural, religious and family networks can help prevention efforts.

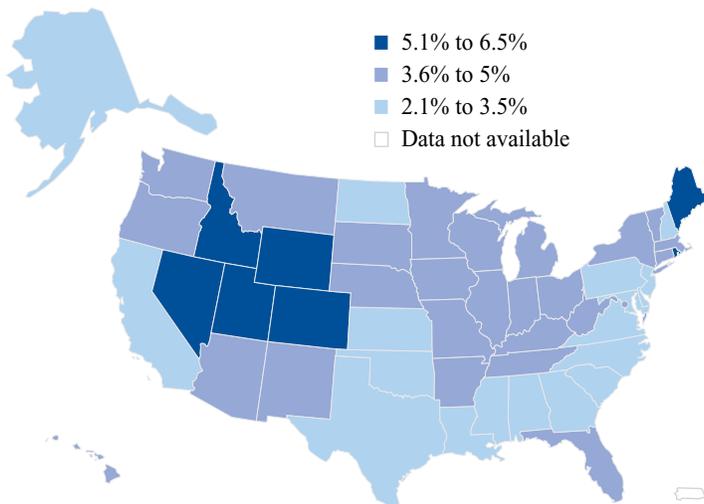
Last year, lawmakers in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, North Carolina and North Dakota passed legislation aimed at preventing suicide. Legislators in Arizona and North Carolina focused on those in the military and veterans, while lawmakers in New Mexico and North Dakota addressed Native American communities.

Colorado's law allows taxpayers to contribute a part of their state income tax refund to the Families in Action for Mental Health Fund, which provides education, advocacy, information and referrals to prevent suicides.

Every state except Mississippi has a comprehensive, statewide suicide prevention plan that includes screening initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and "gatekeeper" training for people who are interested in learning how to intervene and prevent suicides.

—Hollie Hendrikson

## Percentage of Adults Who Seriously Considered Suicide in 2008



Source: CDC, "Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors Among Adults Aged ≥18 Years—United States, 2008–2009," in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Oct. 21, 2011.

## By the Numbers

Among U.S. adults each year:

**8.3 million**

Have serious suicidal thoughts

**2.2 million**

Make a suicide plan

**1 million**

Attempt suicide

Sources: CDC, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and National Institute of Mental Health.

## CAYLEE'S LAW

**T**he disappearance and death of 2-year-old Caylee Anthony and the trial and acquittal last summer of her mother Casey by a Florida court outraged many citizens. Casey had waited 31 days before reporting her daughter missing. That anger led many state lawmakers to introduce bills (often dubbed "Caylee's Law") to criminalize the failure to report a missing or dead child.

"I'm trying to think if at any other time I'd ever had a higher swell of letters and emails from constituents," says Senator Pete Pirsch of Nebraska.

By the end of November, 13 states had filed legislation. The bills usually include the qualifying age of a missing or dead child, how long the legal guardian has to report the incident to law enforcement, and how the crime is classified.

"As a mom with two little boys, when I saw the Casey Anthony case, my heart broke," says Representative Samantha Kerkman of Wisconsin. After determining a new law was needed, Kerkman put together a bipartisan working group of legislators and made a list of things a "Caylee's Law" should accomplish.

The Wisconsin bill focuses on the amount of time a child's caregiver has to report a missing child, with more time given for older children. The bill also addresses reporting the death of a child and the hiding or burying of a child's corpse. "We have to look out for the people who can't speak for themselves," Kerkman says.

Pirsch was hesitant to pass unnecessary legislation merely to satisfy public opinion. After conducting an inventory of Nebraska's laws, however, and as a former prosecutor, he felt the need to define the amount of time allowed before reporting a child missing more specifically than "an unreasonable amount of time."

Florida's Select Committee on Protecting Children held hearings with members of the community, law enforcement personnel and victim advocates before deciding not to include reporting requirements. The committee instead chose to increase the penalties for lying to law enforcement when it results in the death or injury of a child. The committee's work resulted in the final bill introduced by Senator Joe Negron.

Michigan's version of Caylee's law has unanimously passed the Senate and is currently in the Michigan House Judiciary Committee. In December, the New Jersey Legislature passed its version of the law and at press time it was awaiting the signature of Governor Chris Christie.

—Jon Kuhl and Rich Williams