

IN SPORTS

Back to back to back

Running back Roy Helu's strong showing won't change NU's three-man rotation of Helu, Castille and Lucky.



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OMAHA.COM BREAKING NEWS



LAURA INNS/THE WORLD-HERALD

Lindsay Corp. says reflective tape on the CopperCuff is a signal to thieves with flashlights that the galvanized steel cuff will make it tough to remove copper wire from this center-pivot irrigation pipe.

Center-pivot makers find ways to foil copper thieves

BY LESLIE REED

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

GRAND ISLAND, Neb. — Nebraska farmers and law enforcement officials are dealing with the latest wrinkle in copper thefts: stripping the copper wiring from center-pivot irrigation systems.

With such thefts on the rise, three of Nebraska's major irrigation companies are stressing new anti-theft devices at this year's Husker Harvest Days in Grand Island.

A fourth company, T-L Irrigation Co. of Hastings, Neb., now runs a marketing campaign stressing that its hydraulically powered center pivots aren't attractive to thieves because they require no copper electrical wiring.

It's an expensive problem. Depending upon whether other components are damaged, it can cost \$7,000 to \$10,000 to repair the damage caused by copper thieves, manufacturers said. A new pivot costs about \$75,000.

"It's not just the theft, it's the vandalism that goes along with it," said Jim Kostal, an official of T-L Irrigation. "It's

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Theft: Manufacturers of irrigation pivots battle copper problem

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the down time. Our farming community doesn't need it."

Richard Bender, a farmer from Lindsay, Neb., said thieves stripped part of the wire from one of his pivots last fall. This spring, they came back and stole more wire.

He and his brother discovered the thefts when they went to the field in the spring to get the pivot started for the year.

A farmer from the Henderson, Neb., area, who declined to give his name, said he hadn't been victimized yet, but one of his neighbors had been. After tornadoes hit Hamilton County last spring, thieves stole the wiring from damaged center pivots, he said.

Hamilton County Sheriff Kirk Handrup, who confirmed the farmer's report, said he would welcome irrigation company efforts to prevent thefts.

Two people in Hamilton County currently face charges related to stealing copper from irrigation systems, Handrup said.

Irrigation officials say thieves typically take the cable by cutting it at one end, hooking

a chain to it and using a four-wheel-drive pickup to rip it off the top of the watering spans. The wire typically is held in place by only an open hook or a plastic zip tie.

The companies' solutions range from low-tech clamps to high-tech monitoring devices. Most will be available later this fall, in time for farmers to install them while winterizing their irrigation equipment.

Charlie Meis and Tom Korus, longtime engineers at Lindsay Corp.'s plant in Lindsay, spent about a month developing a galvanized steel cuff that bolts over the wire and onto the pivot's watering pipe. The cuff is marked with reflective tape, to be easily seen by potential thieves carrying a flashlight in the dark.

Jeff Herrick, director of parts and service, was unabashed by its simplicity.

"Our goal is to deter thieves with something simple and easy to install, that can be used with any kind of equipment," he said.

The cuffs, which make the wire more difficult to remove, will add about \$500 in cost to a typical-size center pivot.

Reinke Manufacturing, which

is based in Deshler, Neb., sells a \$1,000 satellite-based communications system that enables pivot owners to use their computers to monitor their irrigation systems. A theft sensor can be added for an additional \$150, plus a \$300 annual service fee.

The monitoring system helped catch two theft gangs in Michigan, and thieves were scared away in two incidents in Iowa and South Dakota after farmers headed out to their fields after being alerted by their monitoring systems, said Ken Goodall, sales and marketing support manager.

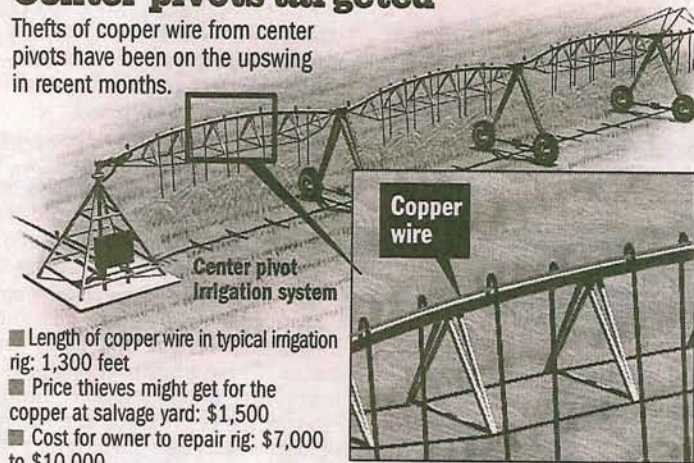
Valmont Industries, which manufactures irrigation equipment in Valley, has developed a \$12.50 U-bolt apparatus to better fasten the wiring to watering pipes. The devices will cost about \$350 for a typical-size pivot.

Valmont also will offer a \$1,200 theft monitoring device that calls a designated cell phone if the wire is cut, said John Rasmus, controls product manager.

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Center pivots targeted

Thefts of copper wire from center pivots have been on the upswing in recent months.



- Length of copper wire in typical irrigation rig: 1,300 feet
- Price thieves might get for the copper at salvage yard: \$1,500
- Cost for owner to repair rig: \$7,000 to \$10,000

Anti-theft strategies

- Some companies have developed heavy-duty clamps to make it more difficult to strip pivot wiring. At bottom right is one such device made by Lindsay Corp.
- Other companies offer high-tech monitoring devices that call the owner if the wiring is tampered with.
- One company now touts its hydraulic oil system as a selling point. Since the system requires no electricity, there's no copper wire to steal.



Photo courtesy of Lindsay Corp.

SOURCES: Lindsay Corp., Valmont Industries, Reinke Manufacturing and T-L Irrigation Co.

DEAN WEINLAUB/THE WORLD-HERALD