

Crime syndicates target schools' copper

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A syndicate is believed to be behind the spate of copper-pipe theft at Peninsula schools, according to a spokesperson for the department of education's Safe Schools programme.

At the weekend, the thieves, who sell the valuable metal on the black market, broke into Fish Hoek Primary School and stole copper piping, affecting the school's water system.

Simon's Town High School was targeted on Saturday.

"The burglaries, theft and vandalism, especially because of copper piping, has been going on since the holidays started. We have come to the conclusion that a syndicate is operating in various areas... When the problem is under control in one area, it moves to another," said provincial Safe Schools manager Nariman Khan.

'They hit us two weekends in a row'

She said they were in contact with various neighbourhood watches and police stations to find ways to combat the problem.

Other areas hit by the copper thieves include Bishop Lavis, Hanover Park, Manenberg and Mitchell's Plain.

"It's costing the department, so we're looking at ways to get vandal-proof equipment installed," said Khan.

Fish Hoek Primary School headmaster Stuart Don said: "They hit us two weekends in a row. Ours is a pretty old school building so the copper is mostly exterior. They've also gone to the water mains where they broke the fittings on the main feed to the school."

A plumber was called in to restore the system but the vandals struck again.

"I don't even want to think what the plumber's bill for last week will be... These guys are only getting away with hundreds of rands but they're costing us thousands," said Don.

Simon's Town High School head Llewellyn Florentino said the vandalism had mostly affected their hostel kitchen and dining room.