

SUPPORT HB 4140 – Protecting Oregon's Critical Infrastructure from Damage and Theft

Oregon's critical infrastructure threat landscape has reached a crisis point. Bad actors strip wiring from traffic signals, gut essential systems from buildings, and tear down communication lines—leaving communities vulnerable and disconnected.

A nationwide communications company found that Washington and Oregon lead the nation in attacks targeting telecommunications infrastructure.^[1] Since spring 2025, Portland police have documented 98 incidents that have caused more than \$2 million in damage to essential systems.^[2]

The consequences extend far beyond property loss. As Portland Police Detective Cameron Smith explained: *"Our 911 system relies on landlines to contact people, hospitals and businesses. This is critical infrastructure. It can represent a safety and sometimes a life safety issue."*^[2]

In December 2025, criminals cut wires to a transfer box controlling traffic lights at a northeast Portland intersection. Police found that the resulting outage contributed to a crash that killed a motorcyclist.^[3]

This pattern is playing out nationwide. The telecommunications industry alone recorded more than 5,700 attacks targeting communications infrastructure in just seven months, an average of 27 incidents per day, disrupting service for more than 1.5 million customers.^[4]

The proposed updates in HB 4140 are not an attempt to reinvent the wheel, but a targeted response to a growing, more organized crisis that threatens public safety.

HB 4140 adds tools to respond to a growing crisis and safeguard the critical infrastructure Oregonians depend on.

Sources:

[1] KGW News, "Companies try to combat copper wire theft as incidents spike in Oregon, Washington" — <https://www.kgw.com/article/news/local/the-story/portland-copper-wire-theft-centurylink-calbag-scrap-metal-sell/283-c2b802da-e0f2-4bc1-a70f-c4c43135715d>

[2] KPTV, "2 arrested in Portland copper wire theft investigation, damages total over \$2 million" (November 2025) — <https://www.kptv.com/2025/11/06/2-arrested-portland-copper-wire-theft-investigation-damages-total-over-2-million/>

[3] KPTV, "Police: Copper wire theft led to traffic light outage, contributed to deadly Portland crash" (December 2025) — <https://www.kptv.com/2025/12/23/police-copper-wire-theft-led-traffic-light-outage-contributed-deadly-portland-crash/>

[4] USTelecom, "The Growing Crisis of Copper Theft" (April 2025) — <https://ustelecom.org/the-growing-crisis-of-copper-theft/>

What the Bill Does

Updates outdated terminology. The bill modernizes references from "telecommunications carrier" to "telecommunications provider," aligning the criminal mischief statute with current Oregon law.

Requires proof of ownership for sensitive items. Commercial sellers offering marked utility or telecom equipment, telecommunications wire, or stripped wire must now provide written documentation proving they own the material or are authorized to sell it. This is a targeted, reasonable safeguard that protects utilities and ratepayers without burdening legitimate recyclers.

Connects scrap dealers to a national theft alert system. Directs scrap metal businesses to register with the free, industry-supported ScrapTheftAlert system maintained by the Recycled Materials Association. This helps dealers identify stolen property before purchase, protecting honest businesses and deterring thieves.

Clarifies what counts as protected commercial metal property. The bill establishes a clear definition of telecommunications wire (copper and copper-alloy materials associated with telecom and broadband networks) and adds stripped wire, metallic wire with insulation removed, to the list of items requiring extra scrutiny, since stripped wire is a common hallmark of stolen material.

