

DA takes Telkom to task over cable theft

Communications Minister Dina Pule says the outsourcing of security has "definitely" reduced copper cable theft from Telkom. SA loses about R20m to copper cable theft every month, spurred by Asian demand for the metal.



(Image: GCIS)

Telkom, Africa's biggest fixed line telephone company, lost about R400m in repair and replacement costs related to copper cable theft in the 2010-11 financial year. This was about R25m less compared with the losses it incurred in the 2009-10 financial year.

Pule said in a reply to a parliamentary question on Friday that before 1998, Telkom itself handled guarding cables and responding to theft on a small scale, but outsourced it when the volume started to grow. Telkom did not view armed response and guarding services as one of its core activities. She said all service providers were held responsible for performance as part of the basic conditions of their contracts.

Telkom needs to take more responsibility for cable thefts

"Guarding and armed response are outsourced services... We are currently testing the market through a comprehensive tender process with a view to appointing service providers for this function," Pule said. "This function is outsourced due to the specialised nature of the service requirements and resource coverage," she said.

Democratic Alliance (DA) MP Pieter van Dalen said Telkom needed to take more responsibility for the cable thefts.

"Telkom has tried to deflect blame regarding the protection of copper cables by stating that their guarding and response units are outsourced... this is no excuse. If Telkom is paying for these services, it must ensure it gets its money's worth from the providers," Van Dalen said.

During the DA's mayorship of Cape Town, the value of stolen copper in the city had reduced from R22m in 2007 to

R500 000 in 2009, he said.

The party had established a "task force" to police the city. The government should implement the Second Hand Goods Law it passed in 2009, but had yet to put into action. It should also make copper theft a priority crime, set copper theft reduction targets for parastatals and ensure close co-operation with industry experts, Van Dalen said.

There has long been talk of designating copper as a precious metal to curb theft.

Van Dalen said the DA would "submit follow-up parliamentary questions to ascertain the total loss in Telkom's revenue and to obtain more comprehensive information on government's plan to address the problem", he said.

Telkom said last month that despite burying cables and employing security services in affected areas, it was unable to police the widespread problem. The company said it had decided not to replace stolen copper cables in certain areas that were frequently hit by copper cable theft.

Source: *Business Day* via I-Net Bridge

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