

Telkom and SAPS partnership to fight theft and vandalism sees results

Telkom and the South African Police Service (SAPS) have successfully secured hundreds of convictions for cable theft. This achievement is a testament to their robust collaboration and a significant step in curbing infrastructure vandalism.



The war against cable theft is being won. Source: Kindel Media/Pexels.

Under the umbrella of Telkom's Group Security Strategy, which emphasises effective security governance and agile, responsive security risk management, the joint effort has led to numerous convictions across the country. These convictions are specifically related to cable theft and infrastructure vandalism, marking a major victory in the fight against these crimes.

The Telkom Security and Investigation Team has played a pivotal role in this endeavour, achieving a substantial reduction in infrastructure-related crime at Telkom facilities. The community has also been instrumental in this success, providing valuable information through tip-offs to both the police and Telkom's reporting hotlines.



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Lindsey Schutters 18 Aug 2023

"Our partnerships made it possible to achieve great results, helping to turn the tide against crime," says Sepadi Nkadimeng, Executive: corporate security executive at Telkom. "Many arrests have been made, but most importantly, we've supported the process of driving cases through the courts to get positive convictions."

50 arrests per month

From July 2017 to December 2023, a total of 3,003 suspects were successfully apprehended – a rate of around 600 arrests per year, 50 per month or 1.5 per day. Cases were opened against 2,549 individuals, and Telkom collaborated with key players inside and outside Telkom to monitor these cases, supporting the NPA Prosecutors with every case, our team of investigators attend every court appearance of accused, also testifying and providing evidence as required.

The Economic Sabotage of Critical Infrastructure (ESCI) Forum, a joint working group between Telkom, Eskom, Prasa and Transnet has estimated that the economic damage caused by copper theft costs the country R7bn every year, with a wide

economic impact closer to R187bn.

It costs Telkom tens of millions of rand every year to replace stolen or vandalised cables, as well as batteries stolen from cellphone towers. On top of this, Telkom budgets even larger amounts for security to protect its assets. South Africa's courts have taken a zero-tolerance approach to cable theft and infrastructure vandalism. Extremely tough jail sentences have been imposed on convicted offenders.

Syndicate ring

One of the most significant sentences occurred during 2023 in the Western Cape, where a syndicate group was successfully dismantled through collaborative efforts by SAPS, Telkom and the community.

The syndicate, implicated cases of theft, racketeering and money laundering in contravention of the Prevention of Organized Crime Act 121 of 1998 (POCA) was targeted in a joint operation.

During the trial, a court heard that the syndicate orchestrated its operations by utilising rented vehicles to steal overhead copper cables from Telkom, Eskom and Transnet facilities across the country, and then transported them to a scrap-metal dealer in Germiston, Gauteng.

The legal proceedings resulted in the successful conviction of all five accused syndicate members who were successfully convicted and sentenced to terms ranging from 18 to 83 years imprisonment, culminating in a combined sentence of 210 years imprisonment.

Results speak

According to cases logged by Telkom, and through collaborative efforts from all parties involved, a stringent approach to sentencing has been consistently applied throughout the country.

Several notable examples illustrate this approach:

- In the **Free State province**, in March 2023, one accused was convicted and sentenced to six years' imprisonment for attempted theft of underground copper cable after 17 court appearances.
- In **Mpumalanga**, in May 2023, one accused was convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for attempted theft of overhead aerial line copper cable after eight court appearances.
- In the **Eastern Cape**, in October 2023, one accused was convicted and sentenced to six years' imprisonment for theft of overhead aerial line cable after four court appearances.
- In **KwaZulu Natal**, in October 2023, one accused was convicted and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment for attempted theft of batteries after 17 court appearances.
- In **North West**, in November 2023, one accused was convicted and sentenced to six years' direct imprisonment for attempted theft of underground copper cable after 21 court appearances.

Beyond these examples, vigilant efforts of prosecution and investigation teams have led to the successful conviction of 522 accused individuals. The collective sentences handed down amount to an impressive 2,594 years' imprisonment.

In addition to the convictions, a further 311 accused individuals currently have warrants of arrests issued against them, with 1,126 accused individuals awaiting trial. "We are extremely proud of the results that have been achieved," says Nkadimeng.

"These successes show that the key to winning the fight against infrastructure theft and vandalism is collaboration with the community, and across industries. We must work together to beat crime."