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Commissioners look to stop road-sign theft

ROGERS COUNTY - Rogers County Board of County Commissioners are seeing a spike in road signage theft leading to extreme dangers for all road travelers, including pedestrians.

District 3 Commissioner Ron Burrows said recently several stop signs were stolen near the Tiawah Elementary School area last week. "This is a very serious concern that could ultimately result in the loss of many lives, especially near the school," Burrows said. Once discovered, county crew immediately installed new signs around 5:30am that day.

District 2 Commissioner Steve Hendrix said his crew replaced more than a handful of signs that were stolen in his area recently and remarked similar concerns as Burrows.

Each reported the thefts occur late at night or in the early morning hours. According to District 1 Commissioner Dan DeLozier, this has been an ongoing occurrence for many years. "Sometimes they end up on someone's wall but mostly discarded into Claremore Lake," he said.

According to District 4's Lee Francis who oversees the signage for the entire county said the theft costs taxpayers thousands of dollars each year.

Stealing road signs is a public safety hazard that could also prevent delays for emergency responders dispatched to a call.

The theft of road signage is prosecutable like any other property crime, according to Oklahoma Statutes Title 21 citing violations and punishment for defacing, stealing, or possessing road signs or markers. When the theft of a stop sign leads to injury or death, the thieves may find themselves criminally liable, further stating the perpetrator may be found guilty of a misdemeanor. Upon conviction the court-ordered punishment may be to pay a fine or restitution, community service or imprisonment in the county jail for a term of 30 days.

If the violation results in personal injury or death of any person, the person committing the violation shall, upon conviction, be found guilty of a felony. The crime is punishable through the court system by imprisonment in the custody of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, or by a fine. Additionally, the person may be ordered to pay restitution, or to perform community

service — or it could be a combination of fine, imprisonment, community service, and/or restitution.