

North Carolina Climber Arrested for Copper Thefts

January 7, 2010 - Contractors will oftentimes help their valued employees out with a payday advance when there are extenuating circumstances.

"Hey boss, I got caught cutting your customers' copper and need five large," is low on the list.

Bondsmen say that is what Christopher Ashley Masters will need to raise to meet the \$50,000 bail set for him yesterday after he was arrested for allegedly stealing copper from cell towers in Craven County, N.C.

Craven County Sheriff Capt. Joe Heckman said Masters, 32, of Kinston, is charged with five counts of breaking and entering and five counts of larceny after breaking and entering.

According to authorities, Masters was an employee with a Florida cell tower contractor and had access to the site compounds.

Heckman said his office worked with investigators in Lenoir and Pitt counties for a number of months to find and arrest someone suspected of stealing from cell phone towers in the three counties.

Heckman said a metal business in Lenoir County put up a surveillance camera and Masters was caught on camera Tuesday night bringing copper to the business.

Sheriff's officers found additional copper inside Masters' home.

Copper thefts from tower sites is an ongoing national problem. A recent string of copper thefts in Cabell County, W.V. saw ten communications towers vandalized since Dec. 28.

Concerned about the thefts, the Cabell County Commission passed a resolution today to appeal to the state's congressional delegation to push for federal legislation that would make theft or damage to communication infrastructure a felony crime.

The commission also said it would look into installing electric fences and razor wire to deter criminals from their sites which have also been hit by thieves.