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Copper thefts: Elia steps up surveillance of overhead lines and calls on local residents to be vigilant.

- Elia's grid has suffered some major thefts of copper in recent days.
- The deliberate destruction of electricity lines is totally irresponsible. The thieves are taking enormous risks.
- The thefts mean that the grid is no longer intact. Repair work is now beginning, at considerable cost.

In recent weeks there has been a wave of copper thefts from Elia's high-voltage grid. Each time the earth wire was cut down and stolen. The thefts occurred in the Belgian provinces of Luxembourg and Flemish Brabant. Elia is stepping up its surveillance of the grid and calling on local residents to inform the police about any abnormal activity near high-voltage lines. The thefts were noticed in the course of scheduled inspections carried out by Elia ground and helicopter patrol teams.

All the thefts occurred on the 70 kV grid. On each occasion, the earth wire was cut, placed on the ground and taken away. All the thefts took place on four high-voltage lines; three in the Belgian province of Luxembourg and one in Flemish Brabant. Elia is taking these copper thefts very seriously and immediately adopted additional measures to protect its infrastructure, stepping up its vigilance in the field and increasing the number of inspection patrols in identified high-risk areas. Cutting away the earth wire is a new phenomenon for Elia. A previous wave of copper thefts occurred in 2016, but back then the circumstances were different.

THIEVES TAKING MAJOR RISKS

The method used by the thieves to steal the copper is extremely risky. Their modus operandi suggests that the thefts are the work of a specialised gang armed with professional knowledge and equipment. Elia has informed the local and federal police, who have launched an investigation.

Elia reiterates that the deliberate destruction and theft of electricity lines is totally irresponsible and extremely dangerous. Thieves who climb pylons to cut earth wires run a serious risk of falling, electrification or even electrocution (electrification with fatal consequences). The thefts all took place in highly inaccessible areas that the thieves would probably have had to reconnoitre beforehand.

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE GRID

Since the thieves stole the earth wire, there have been no power outages. The earth wire is the fine cable uppermost on the pylon. It serves various functions: providing protection against lightning strikes and ensuring a more precise shutdown of the line in the event of an incident.

So the smooth operation of the grid is not immediately jeopardised, but if an incident occurs, the affected line could be disrupted more quickly. To prevent this, Elia immediately set about replacing the stolen earth wires. The

Media contacts:

Marleen Vanhecke (NDL/ENG): +32 486 49 01 09
Jean Fassiaux (FR) +32 (0)474 46 87 82



cost of this replacement will far higher than the market value of the purchase and is disproportionate to the risks taken.



About Elia Group

ONE OF EUROPE'S TOP FIVE PLAYERS

The Elia Group is active in electricity transmission. We ensure that generation and consumption are balanced around the clock, supplying 30 million end users with electricity. With subsidiaries in Belgium (Elia) and north-east Germany (50Hertz), we operate 18,600 km of high-voltage connections. As such, our group is one of Europe's top 5. With a reliability level of 99.999%, we give society a robust power grid, which is important for socio-economic prosperity. We also aspire to be a catalyst for a successful energy transition towards a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy system.

WE MAKE THE ENERGY TRANSITION HAPPEN

By expanding international high-voltage connections and integrating ever-increasing amounts of renewable energy generation, the Elia Group promotes both the integration of the European energy market and the decarbonisation of our society. At the same time, the Elia Group is innovating its operational systems and developing market products so that new technologies and market parties can access our grid, thus making the energy transition happen.

Headquarters

Elia System Operator
Keizerslaan 20
B-1000 Brussels - Belgium

50Hertz GmbH
Heidestraße 2
D-10557 Berlin – Germany



IN THE INTEREST OF SOCIETY

As a key player in the energy system, the Elia Group is committed to working in the interest of society. We respond to the rapidly changing energy mix, i.e. the increase in renewable energy, and constantly adapt our transmission grid. We also ensure that investments are made on time and within budget, with a maximum focus on safety. When we carry out our projects, we manage stakeholders proactively by establishing two-way communication with all affected parties very early on in the development process. We also offer our expertise to our sector and relevant authorities to build the energy system of the future.

INTERNATIONAL FOCUS

In addition to its activities as a transmission system operator, the Elia Group provides various consulting services to international customers through its subsidiary Elia Grid International (EGI). Elia is also part of the Nemo Link consortium that is building the first subsea electrical interconnector between Belgium and the UK.

The Group operates under the legal entity Elia System Operator, a listed company whose core shareholder is the municipal holding company Publi-T.

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