

# Measures Against Organized Theft and Trafficking of Stolen Goods Offenses

## 1 Overview of damage incidents

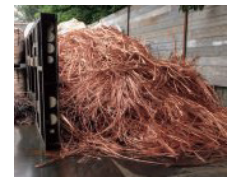
In recent years, organized theft—including metal theft <sup>(Note 1)</sup>, large-scale shoplifting <sup>(Note 2)</sup>, and automobile theft—has been carried out, with stolen goods frequently being sold illegally to buyers. These crimes often involve multiple foreign nationals residing illegally in Japan, and the involvement of senior suspects who direct the offenses suggests a certain level of organization. Groups engaging in such crimes have core structures that are opaque to the outside and repeatedly commit offenses while replacing lower-level members, reflecting the characteristics of anonymous and fluid criminal groups. These crimes have a significant impact on the national economy and the daily lives of the public, and are a major public safety challenge.

### (1) Metal theft

In metal theft cases, foreign groups with members that change frequently steal large quantities of metal cables from solar power facilities and sell them to scrap metal dealers in an organized and planned way.

#### CASE

In May 2024, a 31-year-old Thai man and others stole approximately 100 meters of copper cable and other items, with a total value of about 1.23 million yen, from a solar power generation facility. Investigations revealed that members who had met through a foreign community had formed a group and repeatedly committed theft. By November of the same year, the man and two other suspects had been arrested on suspicion of theft and other offenses. (Ibaraki Prefectural Police)



Stolen copper cable

### (2) Large-scale shoplifting

In large-scale shoplifting cases, ringleaders overseas instruct criminal perpetrators via messaging apps on which items to steal, and then have large quantities of stolen goods sent to designated locations.

#### CASE

From January to February 2024, a 31-year-old Vietnamese woman and others stole approximately 146 articles of clothing, with a total retail price of about 360,000 yen, from a clothing store in a commercial facility. In the same month, three suspects, including the woman, were arrested on suspicion of theft. Further investigations revealed that, under instructions from a ringleader in their home country, the group was formed with members that were replaced each time they entered Japan, with roles divided among criminal perpetrators, lookouts, and transporters, and that they had committed multiple offenses. (Osaka Prefectural Police)

### (3) Automobile theft

In automobile theft cases, ringleaders who collude with illicit automobile dismantling yard operators instruct criminal perpetrators to steal cars, which are then exported overseas through such automobile dismantling yards.

#### CASE

From October 2022 to January 2023, a 33-year-old part-time employee and others stole five passenger cars, with a total value of approximately 24 million yen, in multiple prefectures. Investigations revealed that the men had received instructions from a ringleader and had committed multiple offenses with the aim of exporting the stolen vehicles overseas. By November 2023, six suspects, including the ringleader, had been arrested on suspicion of theft and other offenses. In addition, in June 2023, two Pakistani men, including a 50-year-old man, who operated yards used to export the stolen cars overseas were arrested on suspicion of retaining stolen property. By January 2024, they were also referred for prosecution for violations of the Act on Punishment of Organized Crimes and Control of Proceeds of Crime (concealment of criminal proceeds) and other charges. (Hyogo and Aichi Prefectural Police)

Note 1: Theft involving metal products, including copper plates, copper wire, drain covers, manholes, etc.

Note 2: Shoplifting cases involving total losses of 100,000 yen or more

## 2 Status of countermeasures

To address organized theft and the distribution of stolen goods, the police are centrally and powerfully advancing comprehensive measures that include investigation and deterrence, such as establishing cross-departmental project teams.

### (1) Metal theft

In metal theft cases, the police are actively investigating various illegal activities by criminal groups, using all applicable laws to deter offenses and collect relevant information.

The police are also providing information to solar power generation operators and others that have experienced frequent damage while encouraging them to adopt effective countermeasures, and requesting scrap metal dealers to report cases in which the scrap metal or other materials brought in for purchase are suspected of being stolen.

**MEMO**

### Enactment of the Act on the Prevention of the Disposal of Stolen Specified Metals

In light of the metal theft situation, the National Police Agency convened a “Study Group on Measures Against Metal Theft,” comprising academic experts and industry stakeholders, from September 2024 to January 2025, which led to the compilation of a report entitled “Report of the Study Group on Measures Against Metal Theft.” In June 2025, at the 217th Diet session, the Act on the Prevention of the Disposal of Stolen Specified Metals was enacted, which includes provisions on measures related to businesses engaged in purchasing scrap metal, regulations on tools used in metal theft, and other related measures.

#### Chart IV-1 Overview of the Act on the Prevention of the Disposal of Stolen Specified Metals

① **Establishment of regulations on businesses purchasing scrap metal**

The Act requires businesses engaged in the purchasing of certain scrap metals for which theft prevention is considered particularly necessary to notify the Prefectural Public Safety Commission and to verify the identities of sellers, and establishes necessary regulatory provisions.

② **Establishment of regulations on tools used in metal theft**

The Act prohibits the concealed carrying of certain cable cutters, bolt cutters, and similar tools that are highly likely to be used in metal theft, except when carried for work or other legitimate reasons, and establishes necessary penalties.

③ **Establishment of regulations on the dissemination of theft prevention information**

The Act provides that prefectural police headquarters chiefs and other relevant officials shall endeavor to disseminate theft prevention information concerning certain products manufactured using metals for which theft prevention is considered particularly necessary to people installing solar power generation facilities and other relevant parties, and establishes necessary regulatory provisions.



Tools used in metal theft and stolen items

### (2) Large-scale shoplifting

In large-scale shoplifting cases, the police are encouraging (including through trade associations) clothing retailers, drugstores, and other businesses to implement crime prevention measures, such as installing security cameras.

Since some stolen items are resold on overseas e-commerce websites, the police are urging relevant organizations and groups to take measures to curb the distribution of stolen goods, while requesting investigative cooperation from foreign law enforcement agencies to arrest ringleaders located overseas.

### (3) Automobile theft

In automobile theft cases, the police work in coordination with relevant agencies and departments to share and analyze information related to automobile dismantling yards and similar entities. They actively conduct on-site inspections and other measures under various applicable laws to assess the actual conditions and provide guidance from an administrative perspective, while promoting crackdowns using all available laws to eliminate illicit automobile dismantling yards.

In addition, the police encourage automobile manufacturers to develop cars more resistant to theft and provide automobile dealers and others with information on automobile theft methods, while urging them to encourage customers to take crime prevention measures.

Note: The provisions concerning measures related to businesses engaged in purchasing scrap metal will enter into force by June 2026, and the remaining provisions by September 2025.  
For an overview of the Act, please refer to the QR code.

