



**Testimony of Victor Elazegui, Jr.
Westar Energy
Before the Senate Judiciary Committee
On HB 2312
March 14, 2011**

Chairman Owens and members of the committee, my name is Victor Elazegui Jr., Physical Security Analyst for Westar Energy. On behalf of Westar Energy, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to express Westar's views on House Bill 2312.

It was December of 2007, and if you remember we had one of the worst ice storms that Northeast Kansas has experienced in several years. As a result of the ice, there were many downed power lines which meant that thousands of Kansans were without power. Help came from many other states' utility companies to support Westar's efforts to get the power back on. Many of the utility trucks were equipped with tools and copper wire, and were parked at hotel parking lots. The thefts from the trucks got so out of hand, that third party security companies had to be employed and stationed at numerous sites wherever these utility trucks were parked at night just to keep the trucks from being vandalized. These events would be my introduction to the increasing problem of metal thefts.

In February of 2010, Westar was victim to a single copper theft which totaled more than \$140,000 in damages and loss. Over a period of two nights, copper thieves hit Westar's material distribution center. The thieves broke into the equipment yard and attached a tow cable to a full spool (5 foot wooden reel weighing approximately 5,000 lbs) of expensive utility-grade copper wire. The tow cable is thought to have been connected to a wench on a truck as video showed the reel zipping across the corner of the yard and up over the fence. We found the broken wooden spool empty behind our property. The thieves had done this with two full spools of copper wire. Not only was the copper stolen, but in the process, as the spool was being jerked around being unwound, it had damaged some substation equipment being stored there as well. This is an example of the extreme lengths that these thieves are going through to get their hands on copper materials. The particular wire stolen in this incident is wire that only a utility company should possess.

At Westar Energy, safety is not only one of the company's core values, it is practiced and advocated by each individual employee. During a recent conversation with a Westar employee, she shared her concerns about the metal thefts and how in her new position as a substation apprentice, it had impacted her. Many of the thefts utility companies are witnessing are at substations where the copper is used to ground equipment. This employee shared how she had to be very cautious as she approached the entry to a substation and be vigilant about looking for signs of a break-in before she would touch the entry gate. If any of the equipment has been compromised because of someone stealing the grounds, it can be very hazardous for the employees working in that location. If the ground protection is compromised, a person working at the substation could be electrocuted because of someone wanting to make a few bucks stealing and selling our materials.

Westar Energy asks for your support of House Bill 2312. We know the theft of metals is an increasing problem nationwide. These metals (including utility-grade conductor) are getting salvaged and their theft must be curtailed. Criminal activity will be easier to deter with the measures outlined in this bill.

Curtailling much of the metal thefts is important for the safety of the public, our employees and the reliability of the electrical system. Thank you for your consideration, and I would be pleased to stand for questions at the appropriate time.