

LOCAL NEWS

# Two arrested following Sonoma Developmental Center copper thefts, officials say



An out-of-service fire hydrant sits amongst overgrown vegetation at the former Sonoma Developmental Center campus in Eldridge Tuesday, April 21, 2026. (Beth Schlanker / The Press Democrat)

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Two [Sonoma](#) residents were arrested twice in March on suspicion of stealing copper wiring from the former [Sonoma Developmental Center](#) campus in Eldridge, according to the Sonoma County [Sheriff's Office](#).

The investigation began in February after patrol deputies documented three incidents involving stolen copper, including a large spool and power lines that had been cut and stripped from the property.

Detectives identified the suspects as John Ramey, 58, and James Doyle, 63, both residents of [Sonoma](#).

"Sheriff's deputies continue to patrol the area of SDC as part of their daily patrol activities. We are aware of the issues facing the area and are addressing them as they come up," Deputy Nicholas Miller said Tuesday, April 28. He encouraged people who live near the center to report any suspicious activity to the Sheriff's Office.



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On March 13, detectives conducting surveillance at the developmental center spotted Ramey and Doyle, who they said were seen cutting and stripping copper from abandoned buildings on the campus.

Both men were arrested without incident, officials said, adding that investigators later found stashes of pre-cut and stripped copper wiring hidden along nearby walking trails, which they believe were placed there by the suspects.

Following their arrests, Ramey and Doyle were booked into the Sonoma County jail in Santa Rosa on suspicion of burglary, theft of copper, possession of stolen property, conspiracy and possession of burglary tools. They were later released.

On March 26, deputies spotted a truck registered to Doyle near the site, according to the Sheriff's Office. Deputies later conducted a traffic stop of the vehicle and both men were inside. Deputies reported seeing cut copper wire and tools in plain view in the truck, the office added.

Both were arrested again. Deputies returning to the Sonoma Developmental Center campus discovered a building that had been freshly burglarized, with copper removed, officials said.

The two men were again jailed on suspicion of violating additional theft and possession offenses and later released, according to the Sheriff's Office.

As of an April 19 update, the Sheriff's Office suspects about 1,500 pounds of copper wiring was removed from the developmental center site by the two suspects. Authorities could not say how much that amount of copper is worth financially or provide a scope for how much damage was done to the property.

Word of these arrests comes as residents raise concerns about security and the overall upkeep of the former developmental center campus, which is the site of dozens of abandoned buildings.

Opened in 1891, the developmental center provided medical care to more than 45,000 developmentally disabled people in California before it was officially closed in 2018.

Besides this part of the site, authorities have [transferred about 750 acres of the 945-acre property to the State Parks](#) as open space.

Earlier this month, nearby residents, fearing increased fire risk, sounded the alarm about potential neglect due to overgrown vegetation, damaged buildings and inoperable fire hydrants on the property that authorities said were the result of a broken water main.

Work to [prune the overgrown vegetation](#) began April 20. The status of the fire hydrants remains unclear, but the Sonoma Valley Fire District does have a plan to transport water to the site in the event of fire on the property, an official said.

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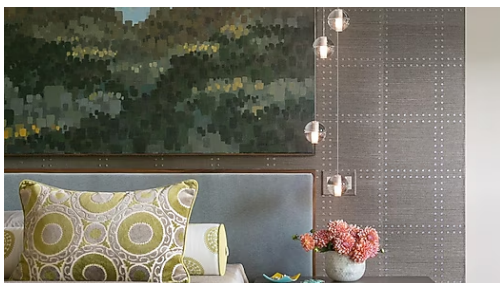
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