

REALTY/BUILDER CONNECTION

A monthly newspaper for real estate agents/brokers, builders, developers and remodelers in Duval, Clay and St. Johns counties.



Providence Homes will start marking its building materials and appliances with SmartWater, a permanent liquid that is forensically coded to identify the owner. Charles Roberts, vice president of Operations for Providence Homes, said warning signs will discourage theft.

By Carole Hawkins, chawkins@realty-builder.com

When an A/C compressor is taken from a job site, that's \$2,000.

Charles Roberts has seen all kinds of materials stolen from homes under construction — appliances, air-handling units, windows, roofing and plumbing.

"We don't know how it's happening," said Roberts, vice president of Operations for Providence Homes.

"A lot of time stuff gets stolen in the middle of the day. They learn the patterns of our supervisors."

Providence Homes has announced it will spray a new invisible tracking system, SmartWater CSI, on just about everything that can be stolen from its job site.

SmartWater is a forensically coded liquid that police can use to identify the true ownership of a marked object. The substance dries clear, but glows when placed under a special 365 nanometer black light.

The product is new in the U.S., but has been used more than 15 years in England and, according to the company, has assisted with more than 1,000 convictions there.

Each batch of SmartWater is embedded with a unique code that is registered to the owner. It lasts five years when sprayed on people or clothes, and indefinitely on objects.

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office has been given special flashlights and is trained to look for glow marks on suspicious items, Roberts said. When found, a swab will be sent to SmartWater's lab, where the code is matched to the owner.

As a further deterrent, Providence Homes will install signs next to dock boxes and put stickers on items to warn would-be thieves.

"The best thing for us would be if we didn't have to deal with the theft," Roberts said. "If it catches on with the other builders, it'll just become harder and harder to take stuff."

The system is already up and running in South Florida, said SmartWater vice president Brenda Bailey, protecting such items as batteries at Ft. Lauderdale water treatment plants and new construction at Boynton Beach.

The signs are a big deterrent, she said. Thefts typically drop about 30 percent. In some communities, they were slashed by as much 70 percent.

Roberts said, "For us, if it prevents one A/C compressor from being stolen a year, it's worth it." 10/23/2014

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