

## THEFT OF LEAD AND POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS

Given the frequency of repeated thefts, or attempted thefts, of lead roofing, the DAC is now regularly approached for its view on the replacement of sheet lead and lead flashings with alternative products like terne-coated stainless steel or felt-based systems. The Committee will usually support a change from lead to another **appropriate** material in the following circumstances:

- When such a change will have no detrimental historic or aesthetic impact.
- In visually discreet areas, like flat or shallow-pitched roofs concealed behind parapets.
- Where the roof is inconspicuous or of no historic importance.
- On ancillary structures of less significance than the main body of the church fabric; for example, on minor vestry or porch additions.
- Where there have been multiple thefts within a short period of time.

The DAC favours like-for-like replacement of lead where this is possible. If a theft occurs, PCCs and their architects should consider the environmental and conservation benefits of replacing the lead before considering other materials less attractive to thieves. Lead is a sustainable material that can be easily cut and dressed to accommodate awkward details, provides reliable weather protection, and can easily be repaired in the event of local damage.

### Alternative materials

Where replacing lead is not possible, or would leave the building very vulnerable to repeated attacks, the Committee is strongly of the opinion that terne-coated stainless steel is by far the best alternative roofing material on shallow-pitched or flat roofs, but is unlikely to be cheaper than lead and may even be a good deal more expensive. Stainless steel can look extremely good, can be as long lasting as lead or slate, is almost impossible to remove, and has negligible scrap value. However, it can sometimes be noisy in inclement weather, and may be subject to technical problems concerning underside corrosion.

Felt-based roofing systems are short-lived and can be subject to maintenance problems. They may sometimes be acceptable on fairly modern or unlisted structures, but are completely unsuitable for historic buildings and extremely unlikely to receive approval from the DAC or the support of English Heritage, local authorities or the Amenity Societies. As a replacement for more traditional materials they are a very poor false economy.

Churches roofed in slate, tiles or other non-metallic materials are still likely to have large areas of lead flashings which can be very vulnerable. In some case it may be appropriate to replace stolen flashings with new reinforced mineral- or plastic-based materials like **Ubiflex**, which can be dressed like lead, are suitably coloured and recyclable, and have no scrap value.

### Permissions and procedures

As soon as a theft occurs, contact your insurance company and Inspecting Architect immediately, and arrange to have the damaged area sheeted to prevent water ingress. Your architect will probably be able to suggest suitable people to do this. If you have the opportunity to take photographs of the damaged areas, these may prove useful later when making faculty applications and insurance claims. Information and advice on procedure, and all necessary forms, can be obtained from the DAC Secretary or the Diocesan Registry.

When stolen metals are to be replaced like-for-like in the same materials, **a faculty will still be required**. However, the Chancellor may be content to permit a change of materials when the area concerned is not generally visible.

Following cases of theft of roofing metals, flashings, or guttering, an **Emergency Licence to Proceed in Advance of Faculty** may be issued whilst the proper faculty procedure is followed, but only if the building cannot effectively be protected (albeit only temporarily) from water ingress which would severely compromise the structure or damage immovable contents such as major electrical components or a pipe organ.

Parishes must note that the ultimate responsibility for proposing **any** change from lead roofing to an alternative material must lie with the Inspecting Architect to the church. On all Grade I and Grade 2\* buildings such changes will certainly require the support of English Heritage, and possibly the local authority. Some local authorities may require Planning Permission for any change of roof covering, founded upon a literal interpretation of the phrase 'material change', which they take to mean any change of material rather than any significant change in appearance.

On the other hand, the current approach and philosophy of English Heritage and some of the Amenity Societies would seem to be reasonably pragmatic and close to that of the DAC. Like the DAC, English Heritage considers each individual case on its merits, and both have recently supported changing from lead to terne-coated stainless steel on churches within the Diocese covering the complete range of listing grades; Grade I, Grade 2\* and Grade 2. Please refer to English Heritage's advice note on their website at [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk) or open link - [Theft of Metal Roof Coverings from Churches and other historic buildings](#)

If sheet lead roofing is to be put back, architects should consider specifying that it be fixed using hollow rolls rather than wood-core rolls if the pitch of the roof allows. The copper fixings used to secure hollow rolled sheet lead make it more difficult to remove. Parishes should also give very serious consideration to putting effective security measures in place to reduce the risk of future attacks. The Ecclesiastical Insurance Group issues an extremely useful Guidance Note on **Theft of Metal** which can be consulted at: [www.ecclesiastical.com/theftofmetal](http://www.ecclesiastical.com/theftofmetal)