

# Senate bill aims to combat pharmaceutical theft

March 8 2011, By MATTHEW PERRONE , AP Health Writer

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(AP) -- Law enforcement officials would have more leeway to pursue and punish criminals who steal prescription pharmaceuticals under a proposal introduced Tuesday by Senate lawmakers.

A bill supported by five Democrats would increase the penalties for stealing stolen medical products and give police extra tools, including wiretaps, to track thieves. The bill accomplishes this by bringing medical theft under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations law, which was originally developed to prosecute organized crime.

The measure comes amid a rise in the value of pharmaceutical heists, which has increased 350 percent since 2007. Last March, the theft of \$75 million worth of Eli Lilly drugs from a Connecticut warehouse drew new attention to the problem. It was the largest crime of its kind on record.

Along with stiffer penalties, the bill would formally criminalize the acts of storing, transporting or changing labels on stolen medical products. Those activities are currently not covered by criminal statutes.

The drug industry recently formed a group called the Coalition for Patient Safety and Medicine, to lobby for better drug and device security measures. The group includes Johnson & Johnson, GlaxoSmithKline PLC and Novo Nordisk.

The bill was introduced by Sens. Bill Nelson of Florida, Sherrod Brown

of Ohio, Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota and Charles Schumer of New York.

"When criminals get their hands on these drugs, nothing less than the integrity of our medical system is compromised, and that's because stolen drugs often make it back into our pharmacies and hospitals," Schumer said.

Last year \$184 million worth of prescription drugs were stolen in the U.S., according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Experts say the increasing thefts are due to both spotty security and high drug prices that can make such thefts extremely lucrative. Most of the heists involve cargo stolen from trucks or cargo containers, though company warehouses have also been hit.

Widely abused drugs like morphine and codeine are peddled on the street, but more specialized prescription drugs are often repackaged and sold back to medical suppliers. When the drugs are not stored properly they can prove fatal.

In 2009, a refrigerated truck of insulin worth more than \$10.9 million was stolen from Novo Nordisk in North Carolina. Months later the Food and Drug Administration reported several cases of diabetics showing up in emergency rooms with unsafe blood sugar levels; the cases were traced to the stolen insulin, which was not properly refrigerated.

Major drugstore chains say they purchase pharmaceuticals only from manufacturers or wholesalers that certify the source of their product. But with layers of drug wholesalers, distributors and online pharmacy businesses across the U.S., experts say stolen [prescription drugs](#) can easily be resold.

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