

## **SCRAP METAL SMUGGLING RAMPANT IN NORTH KOREA**

As smuggling scrap metal across the DPRK-PRC boarder has become widespread among North Korean residents lately, police are investigating the illegal trade, leading to the arrest of all of the residents in the border region that were involved in the smuggling. On April 1, the Daily NK quoted a source inside North Korea reporting that a group was arrested while transporting six tones of scrap metal to smuggle out to China via the highway connecting Yanggang Province's Kabsan Town and Hyesan City, and subsequently imprisoned.

Those arrested were from 'Unit 8', an office in Hyesan under the direction of the People's Trading Bureau regional office tasked with delivering and selling gold, food, oil and other goods in China and returning with materials needed in the North.

According to the source, "An order was handed down by the central government at the beginning of March to 'come down hard on those scrap metal smugglers', and the police and security force investigation is ongoing." The source went on to report that in the Kumsandong Fertilizer Factory in Hyesan, "everything metal that wasn't bolted down is gone, and only the walls of the factory remain...in the future [authorities] will punish scrap metal smugglers severely."

It appears that scrap metal smuggling began to become popular in 2004, but these days, in the border areas, starving soldiers are using military vehicles to buy scrap metal from regions further from the border, then selling them in the Hyesan-Jangbaek border region. In the Yanggang and North Hamkyung Regions of North Korea, famine first spread in the mid-1990s, at which time emerged the presence of smugglers who quietly amassed copper, aluminum,

nickel, and other metals and sold them in China. In response, North Korean authorities attempted to crack down, using public firing squads as a deterrent, but as border guards were in the pockets of smuggling residents of the border region, they became implicated in the cross-border illegal trading, and the crack downs became effectively useless.