PREVENTING HEAVY EQUIPMENT THEFT

How to Prevent Heavy Equipment & Skidsteers from being Stolen

(Sources: IRMI, Construction Business Owner, Construction Connect)

Heavy equipment theft from construction worksites is a growing problem across America. The National Equipment Register (NER) estimates the value of construction equipment stolen each year is somewhere between $300 million to $1 billion. Less than 25% of stolen construction equipment is recovered each annually.

While security precautions are often undertaken, attention to security tends to wane over time. What are the greatest theft exposures? To catch a thief, you need to think like a thief, and heed their suggestions on how to avoid being ripped off.

Tips from the Thieves

1. They most fear getting caught when stealing, storing, or moving the equipment. The risk of getting caught when selling the equipment is considered low because owners tend not record serial numbers, buyers of used equipment tend not to check titles, and even with leads, it is difficult for police to identify equipment and link serial numbers to owners.
2. Sites tend to either be well secured or not—either because the worksite is impossible to secure or due to the attitude of the contractor. There are enough sites with poor security to keep thieves in business for years. It is not necessary to be 100 percent secure, but to be at least better than average, so thieves opt for the less secure sites.
3. There is no point in setting up security procedures that are either too complex or not regularly checked, as thieves will just watch and wait until security starts to decline.
4. Employees of your firm and other local firms are both your best allies and biggest risks. They are the ones who will usually be responsible for the implementation of security and may even know something about a theft. They may even be the ones that let the thieves know about poor security. The key is to give then incentives to help rather than hinder.
5. If you don't record your serial numbers, you can forget about getting your equipment back. Even if recovered, you still must prove that it is yours. Better still is to find a way of making this information readily available to law enforcement and use signs and decals to let the thief know this has been done.

5 Simple Steps to Minimizing Heavy Equipment Theft

1. *Maintain a Secure Site*

When beginning a new project, your first line of defense against equipment theft is jobsite awareness. For instance, if you are leaving your heavy equipment overnight on the jobsite, make sure the area is well-lit and easily seen from a road to deter thieves. In addition, set up site security devices, such as an alarm system or video surveillance to monitor the site during working and nonworking hours. Some common-sense tips that should not be overlooked are locking the cabin door and closing any windows when the operator is done working. Do not leave the keys with the machine. Other proactive steps you can take to secure the jobsite include:

- Get to know other companies or contractors working on the jobsite.
- Add a chain-link fence or gate.
- Post warning and no trespassing signs
- Limit the number of individuals with access.
- Install security lighting or use a light tower to illuminate the jobsite.
- Consider hiring a security guard service for larger jobsites that contain high value equipment

- Purchase equipment with keypad starts if possible.
- Install a battery disconnect switch and hide it on the machine.
- Unplug the wire going to the fuel solenoid pump and tuck it out of sight, usually it could be hidden behind another wiring harness.
- Add a master lock on the backdoor mechanism and lock it If applicable to the equipment.
- Install a security bar over the driver controls.
- Install a tire boot when the machine is not in use.
- Position equipment on the jobsite to be prominent and in positions that limit accessibility.

If you are unable to secure the jobsite, or you are concerned about the security of your equipment, look for a safer area to store your equipment within driving or hauling distance to your jobsite. It may be more work upfront, but it can be worth the costs when it comes to preventing theft.

2. *Know your Equipment*

It sounds simple. How well do you really know the equipment on every project? Familiarizing yourself with the make, model number, serial number and purchase dates of heavy equipment and keeping that information on file is another way to help reduce the chance of theft. Take a picture of every machine and save it with the machine details. This information should be stored in a secure location, away from the jobsite. Ask your equipment sales specialist if you are unaware of the serial plate locations on your machines.
In addition, make sure to register your heavy equipment through the National Equipment Register (NER) or the NCIC to help increase your odds of recovery if the equipment is stolen. The NER is a national database of stolen heavy equipment and ownership to help recover equipment for owners and insurers of equipment.

3. *Utilize Fleet Tracking Technologies*

As an added means of protection, today's heavy equipment is likely already equipped with on-board, fleet-tracking technologies to track and report data in real time. Telematics systems can provide you with a better understanding of how, when and where construction equipment is being used. The location is provided in longitude and latitude, and the mapping software automatically changes to the closest address.
In addition to tracking the physical machine location, many equipment manufacturers offer a geofence or time-fencing feature to help business owners or fleet managers monitor unscheduled use and track machines in the event of theft or vandalism. With a geofence, you can set virtual GPS boundaries, and if a machine moves outside of the boundary, you are notified via email or text message.
Many fleet-tracking technologies use a terminal that is installed on the machine to gather and communicate data wirelessly via cellular or satellite service. The machine's data is then sent to a website, where you, your operators and your equipment dealer can monitor the machine's performance, operating hours, fuel usage, engine idle time and work time. You can also monitor engine/hydraulic oil temperature and monitor fault and warning codes via a computer or cellular device.

4. *Train Operators on Site Protocol*

On any construction jobsite, it is important to educate your equipment operators on site protocol. At the end of each shift, have your operators park the equipment, shut, and lock the cab door and log each piece of equipment according to site protocol. Some owners have their operators park the equipment in a circle, with compact equipment placed in the middle to lower the risk of theft.

5. Report Heavy Equipment Theft

According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, delayed reports of stolen equipment are the No. 1 reason why equipment is not recovered. The quicker you or your operators report the theft, the more likely the equipment will be recovered. If you are a victim of theft, execute these actions:

- Look for it via fleet tracking technologies
- Notify the authorities and relay details of the missing machine, such as size, color, and model
- Inform your insurance company to get started on your claim
- Report your machine to the NER

Equipment theft is a frustrating and costly issue in the construction industry. Develop a comprehensive theft prevention plan and promote constant vigilance to help minimize theft and vandalisms.

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