

Members Take Steps to Prevent Theft

Since January, members have reported over 23 pieces of stolen equipment to the Iowa-Nebraska Equipment Dealers Association. These thefts ranged from skid loaders and mini-excavators, to mowers, ATVs, gators and more.

Several members have taken steps to help prevent theft at their businesses. From installing global positioning systems (GPS) and surveillance cameras, to electrical cords, burglar alarms and fencing, members have not taken the threat of theft lightly. Following is a brief look at the different types of theft prevention utilized by Association members.

Global Positioning Systems

Several members, especially those in the construction equipment industry, often have global positioning systems (GPS) on their equipment. While some members install GPS on units themselves, other units come directly from manufacturers with GPS already installed. For instance, Komatsu (as part of the Komtrax program) has made GPS standard on units introduced after January 1, 2006.

While the primary function of GPS is to track equipment repairs, members have also discovered it's a great way to locate a missing piece of equipment. "A contractor or dealer can set up an electronic fence around an area in which the Komatsu unit is going to be used," explained Larry Smith of Road Machinery in Des Moines, Iowa. "This can be set up as a few feet or many miles. If the unit is taken out of that area, only a Komatsu dealer has the ability to start the unit."

"It's a great way to keep track of units," stressed Smith. "We can 'ping' them every day and find the locations and error codes on the control units." He added that customers can also "ping" the units to find a location, determine the amount of fuel remaining in the tank, and get performance read-outs.

Currently, Road Machinery only has GPS on their Komatsu units. "We will install GPS on our other brands when we find a way to do it as well as Komatsu," stressed Smith.

Bruce Bowman added, "I don't really look at GPS as a theft deterrent, but more as a recovery device instead. However, I feel that any time you can deter and/or recover equipment from theft, it's a good investment."

"Since we are doing more and more business outside the state of Iowa and we rent highly mobile equipment, we felt that installing GPS on our units was the right way to go," explained Bowman of Star Equipment in Des Moines, Iowa. "It allows us to quickly locate a piece of equipment and determine whether it's moving out of the area where the customer said it would be used."

Fencing

Steve Swartzrock decided it was time to install a fence around his dealership when a new Brent cart was stolen from his business. "I knew that he (the burglar) was going to come back and steal more," said Swartzrock with a sigh.

His problems virtually disappeared after installing the fence two years ago. "I feel the fence around our business makes it look harder to steal, which causes thieves to move down the road to another business without a fence," said Swartzrock. He recommends placing remotes in company pick-up trucks so you can open and close the gate from the vehicle, and posting home and cell phone numbers both in and outside the fence.

A fence was installed around Vetter Equipment in August, following a rash of theft and vandalism during the summer months. "Our lot was already fenced on three sides, but after the thefts and vandalism this past year, we decided to install fencing on the fourth side to completely enclose the lot," explained Carswell. Since that time, the Nevada, Iowa dealership has had no further incidents.

In addition to fencing, Vetter Equipment now features more outside lighting, as well as a video surveillance/recording system. "If something like this happens again, we'll have a better chance of helping the police identify the culprits," added Carswell.

Bull Pen

When Green Line Equipment constructed "bullpens" at both its Grand Island and Norfolk, Neb. locations, it not only found a way to provide superior security for its equipment, but a better way to market the equipment as well.

"We used to chain several items together with one long chain," explained Russ Rerucha of Green Line Equipment. "It was pretty easy for someone to cut the chain and have access to all of the items. Our new bullpen fencing is made with one-inch steel rods, which are much more difficult to cut through."

Rerucha added that the bullpen has helped the dealership market its equipment better. "We used to have our used lawn and garden equipment chained up in various spots on the lot, so we had to mow around them and trudge through the mud to view the equipment," he explained. "The bullpen contains a cement floor with secure fencing, and the items remain very visible through it."

So far, the bullpens are working great at both locations. "I recommend bullpens," emphasized Rerucha. "While nothing is completely foolproof from thieves, the bullpen does make it much more challenging for them."

Surveillance Cameras

Over the last several years, things like cracked windshields would "suddenly appear" on vehicles in the morning at Carroll Implement in Luverne, Iowa. While Jim Carroll

suspected what was causing the cracks, he was unable to prove it. It wasn't until the dealership installed surveillance cameras last May that this activity stopped.

"We haven't had any problems since we installed the cameras," explained Carroll, who decided to give surveillance cameras a try after observing the cameras at an area tire dealer. The dealership, which also sells gasoline, has found the cameras useful. "We don't have inside readouts on our gas, so some mornings our amounts would be off with no way to verify it," explained Carroll. "Now we can go right down the book and document it."

Carroll found surveillance cameras to be the most cost effective form of theft prevention. "Our dealership also saved more than \$6,000 from last year on insurance costs. Our new insurance provider said the cameras helped reduce our costs."

While Bancroft Equipment has never been burglarized, Randy Hinton decided to take action when a neighboring dealership was hit. "Over the last 1½ years, thieves have been stealing skid loaders, gators, etc. along Highway 30," explained Hinton. "I decided to be proactive rather than reactive."

The 10 cameras at the Bancroft, Iowa dealership are activated as soon as movement is detected. "I can sit in my office and see what's going on throughout the whole organization," said Hinton. "In addition, I can pull up what was going on at midnight last night anywhere inside and outside of the building."

In addition to the surveillance cameras, Bancroft Implement also has an alarm system. "I'm glad that I put them in place," emphasized Hinton. "I plan to do it in other stores locations as well."

Electrical Cords

Over five years ago, at the insistence of their insurance agent, Southard Implement installed electrical cords through its equipment displayed outside the business. "We'd had too many things stolen," said Larry Southard. "So we decided to try this program through ADT."

According to Southard, the program has been quite successful for the dealership. "It definitely reduced our theft loss considerably at all three store locations," he emphasized. "It's well worth the expense."

He encourages members to give it a try. "If you plan to leave equipment outside and want exposure after hours, this has been an excellent way to handle it."