

## Preventing Construction Site Theft

The Ontario Provincial Police estimates that between \$15 and \$20 million worth of heavy construction equipment is stolen in the province each year.<sup>i</sup> Add to that the cost of looted materials and tools, damage to equipment and premises caused during thefts and the losses from business interruption, it is obvious that construction site theft is a serious and costly issue.

In the U.S., The National Equipment Register (NER) acts as a database of stolen heavy equipment, sharing information between insurers, equipment owners, potential buyers and law enforcement. According to the NER's 2013 Equipment Theft Report, the high value of equipment, poor site security, opportunities to sell stolen equipment, the low risk of arrest and lenient penalties for thieves all contribute to the frequency of equipment theft. This same study shows that only 21% of equipment reported stolen through the NER is ever recovered.

Because of the low recovery rates for material and equipment, a proactive theft prevention plan is imperative for every construction site, no matter the size of the project. Often the aim isn't to make your job site as secure as Area 51, just more secure than the job site down the road.

### Theft Prevention Tips:

- **LIGHT IT UP** - A well-lit job site makes it difficult for thieves to get into the site and leave unseen.
- **SECURE YOUR PERIMETER** - Temporary fencing is an inexpensive way to deter thieves by making it difficult for them to access your site.
- **IMMOBILIZE LARGE EQUIPMENT** - Prevent the theft of large equipment such as diggers and forklifts by installing immobilization or battery disconnect devices. Use locking devices such as boots, or surround equipment overnight with stacked materials. Have a system in place to manage equipment keys and keep them in a secure location.
- **KNOW WHO'S WHO** - Do detailed background checks on new hires and keep the use of subcontractors to a minimum. Make sure all workers and visitors sign in and out.
- **SET THE TONE** - Make sure everyone who enters the site knows that theft of any kind will be reported to the police. Give your employees the opportunity to anonymously report any worksite thefts by providing them with a 'hotline' number or the contact details for *Crimestoppers*.
- **TRACK YOUR TOOLS** - Whether you use a simple engraver, bar code tracking or a sophisticated microchip tracking system to manage tools on your smartphone, put a system in place and use it. A thorough tracking system help prevent theft from occurring in the first place, but if a burglary still occurs, a detailed list of tools and equipment is essential if you have to complete a police report or make an insurance claim.

- LOCK AWAY TOOLS AND MATERIALS - at the end of the work day, make sure all materials and tools are securely locked away in a storage container, locked job site trailer or locking tool box, and be sure to invest in good locks.
- PLAN MATERIAL DELIVERIES - Arrange for materials to arrive only when needed (just-in-time delivery) because the longer materials are sitting around on your site, the more opportunity thieves have to steal them. If materials must be ordered in advance (to take advantage of sales pricing, for instance), make sure they are securely locked away or stored off-site.
- GET NEIGHBOURS ON YOUR SIDE - If you are working on a residential project, introduce yourself to neighbours and give them your phone number. If they see anything suspicious such as a truck that rolls up alongside the site with its lights off, they can call you right away. At the end of the job, give them a small token of appreciation.
- CONSIDER A SECURITY SERVICE - If you have a large site or an extensive inventory of valuable materials or equipment, a third party security plan may be in order which might include on-site 24-hour security personnel, online tool and heavy equipment tracking, security alarms and video monitoring.

If a theft does occur, be sure to report it to the police promptly, as your theft may be part of a pattern. Whether you have property coverage, contractor's equipment insurance or builder's risk insurance, make sure you know what your insurance covers and what it doesn't.

No job site is completely safe from determined thieves. But the more steps you take to prevent theft at your site, the more likely the thieves will set their sights elsewhere.

### **Read more:**

Missing in Action (<http://ohba.ca/magazines/27/articles/89>)

Stolen Construction Equipment Bulletin (<http://stolenheavyequipment.com/>)

National Equipment Register (<http://www.ner.net/>)

Loss Prevention and Security Techniques (<http://www.ner.net/docs/WebLossPrevention.pdf>)

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<sup>i</sup> [www.oswca.org](http://www.oswca.org)