

Despite the best efforts of owners and operators of heavy equipment, more than 250 pieces of heavy equipment are stolen in the United States each week. Only about 20 percent of stolen equipment is ever recovered. Although the cost of equipment theft is not precisely known, the National Insurance Crime Bureau® estimates that close to \$1 billion a year is lost nationwide due to the theft of heavy construction equipment and tools.

A survey by Equipment World magazine revealed that almost 70 percent of the respondents had experienced equipment theft. It now accounts for more than 50 percent of all heavy equipment losses—much higher than collision (10%), fire (8%) and vandalism (6%).

Why is Equipment Stolen?

The answer is quite simple. The reward for the thief far outweighs the risk. Heavy equipment often has little physical security (mechanical or site), and it is valuable and easy to resell. The low rate of recovery is also a clear indication of the low risk for the thief. Even if an item is recovered, an arrest may not be made. If an arrest is made, however, a conviction is not guaranteed; if there is a conviction, the penalty is usually light. Thieves are also attracted to theft of heavy equipment for the following reasons:

- Registration of off-road vehicles and equipment is not required.
- Equipment is identified by product identification numbers, not the same standards used for cars and trucks.
- There is a high demand for heavy equipment.
- It's easy—there is often poor security at an equipment site.

What Types of Equipment are Stolen?

Three types of equipment account for 78 percent of the losses: mower, riding or garden tractor—37%, backhoe/skid steer—26%, tractors—15%. A study by LoJack



Corporation concurs with these statistics and adds that generators and air compressors are becoming popular targets for thieves, as well. Rented equipment is stolen in larger numbers than owned equipment for the following reasons:

- Operators and company owners are less likely to make efforts to enhance physical security.
- Retailers often do not allow renters to add physical security measures to the equipment.
- Rental equipment is often in transit or left unattended while on a trailer.
- Thieves use false identities to rent and steal equipment.

Over 40 percent of all heavy equipment thefts occur in the following six states:

- Texas
- Florida
- North Carolina
- California
- Georgia
- Oklahoma

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Heavy Equipment Theft Prevention

To help reduce the frequency of heavy equipment theft, a comprehensive theft prevention program should be implemented. The components of a program should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Record the make, model, serial number and/or VIN numbers of each piece of equipment. This documentation should be stored in a secure location, away from the job site.
- Register all heavy equipment through local law enforcement efforts (Operation Identification), through the National Equipment Register or the National Crime Information Center.
- Fence all job sites with a minimum 6-foot chain-link fence and secure all gates with heavy chains and locks.
- Light all job sites to a minimum of 2 foot-candles.
- Secure all mobile equipment by installing mechanical means, such as tire locks, drive control locks, trailer hitch locks, hydraulic bypasses, fuel cutoffs, hydraulic arm locks, ignition bypasses, etc.
- Store all portable tools in lockable gang boxes that are secured to a structure or other sturdy object.
- Track all heavy equipment using electronic GPS systems.

For large job sites that contain much high value equipment and tools, consider hiring a security guard service to randomly or routinely patrol the site during all nonworking hours.

For Additional Information

National Equipment Register: www.ner.net

Equipment World:

www.equipmentworld.com – Theft Prevention

- **Grading & Excavation Contractor:**
gradingandexcavation.com – Theft Prevention

LoJack Corporation: www.lojack.com – Theft Study

EMC Insurance Companies: www.emcins.com

- Tech Sheets – Contractor Best Practices –
Managing Risks On The Job