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Crime Prevention Unit
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Construction Site Crime Prevention

The theft of machinery and equipment, tools, appliances and furnishings, and material supplies from construction sites can be a serious problem. Although most contractors are insured for this type of loss, insurance costs are increasing.

There are obviously many different types of construction projects. In this chapter, construction projects will be divided into two basic types; capital construction and residential construction.

A capital construction project usually involves one or more very large buildings. Such projects may include hospitals, schools, government buildings, office buildings, shipping malls, libraries, hotels, etc. Many times these construction projects are enclosed by a fence defining the project "footprint."

Residential construction presents unique protection challenges. In a new residential development, homes are built at different places at different times. Seldom are the home building sites fence enclosed. Instead of a general contractor or construction manager for a capital construction project, often numerous different builders are involved in a single residential development.

What is Stolen?

The following are among the many types of items stolen from construction sites:

- Heavy equipment – backhoes, Ditch Witches
- Utility trailers
- Lumber
- Mortar mixers
- Hand and power tools
- Appliances and furnishings – air conditioners, kitchen appliances, carpeting, light fixtures, cabinets, etc.
- Copper
- Drywall
- Tile

Residential Development Crime Prevention Initiatives

The following are a number of possible crime prevention initiatives for the protection of residential development homes under construction:

- Have a pre-construction crime prevention meeting with the developer and possibly builders. Discuss possible crime prevention initiatives and encourage active participation.
- The developer might provide nighttime and weekend security officers until the residential development is substantially completed.
- Move quickly to form a Neighborhood Watch program and encourage residents in new homes to watch homes under construction. For some residential developments, the initial construction phase may be the most vulnerable time for theft and loss.
- When wooden construction packages are delivered, have them marked immediately with bright paint. This wood construction material will eventually be covered up inside the home.
- For heavy equipment on the construction site, recommend the following measures:
 - ✓ The name of the company owning the heavy equipment should be die stamped underneath the serial number of the piece of equipment.
 - ✓ The company name should be die cast in two (2) or more hidden areas on the piece of equipment.
 - ✓ All heavy equipment should be identified with non-removable weather proof seals.
 - ✓ The company name should be welded onto the equipment.
 - ✓ Keys should be removed from the equipment when it is not in use.
 - ✓ Removing ignition wires or the battery and lowering all blades or buckets can immobilize large equipment.
 - ✓ Theft prevention devices to disable fuel, hydraulic, and/or electrical systems can be installed in heavy equipment.
 - ✓ Wheel locks or immobilizers can be installed on smaller wheeled vehicles, generators or compressors, and pickup trucks.
 - ✓ Lojack or Teltrac Systems can be installed in heavy equipment.
- It may be a requirement that persons cannot have construction materials in their possession on the job site without a receipt for same.
- Vehicle entrances into the residential development could be gated and locked during evening and weekend hours.
- At least one city in California passed an ordinance for home sites encompassing an acre or more must be enclosed by a 6' fence and perimeter lighting.

Capital Construction Crime Prevention Strategies

- **Before Breaking Ground**
 Well before breaking ground or moving equipment onto a construction job site, the construction manager or superintendent should schedule a pre-construction meeting with representatives of the local law enforcement agency and the local fire department.
 At this meeting, the law enforcement representatives should be given the details of the construction project, type of construction, work schedule, the projects' starting time and projected date of completion. The names of key personnel, with telephone numbers, and how to reach them during non-working hours, are also essential.
 The police and fire departments should be advised about such things as the delivery of critical material and unusual job site activities that could require their special attention. Tell the police how equipment is marked for identification. The local police department should be requested to conduct a crime prevention survey of the construction site.
- **Company Crime Prevention Coordinator**
 The general contractor or construction management company should designate an employee as the company crime prevention coordinator. This should be someone who has management level communication and multi-job site mobility. This responsibility is often assigned to a VP for Operations, Safety Director or Risk Manager. All construction

- site losses should be immediately reported to this individual. The company crime prevention coordinator should serve as the direct link or liaison with the local law enforcement agency 24 hours a day.
- **Identify Assets and Property**
All assets on a construction site should be identified (marked), inventoried (records), and tracked as closely as practical. A company identification numbering system should be developed. This could be the company tax identification number. Corporate equipment should have some type of logo/advertising prominently displayed. Employees should be strongly encouraged or even required to have their personal property engraved with an identification number (usually driver's license).
 - **Surveillance of the Job site**
The company crime prevention coordinator should contact neighbors around the job site residents, businesses, bus drivers, cab drivers, even children and solicit their support and help in maintaining a safe and secure job site. Emphasize the concern for personal safety as well as property security.
 - **Signing For Deliveries Requires Serious Attention**
A standard procedure for checking material on and off the job site should be established and followed.
 - ✓ One person should be assigned the responsibility of maintaining tight inventory control of all materials and tools delivered, and only sign for each delivery after carefully checking the invoice for shortages.
 - ✓ Critical material should not be stored on the job site any longer than necessary. Whenever possible, the delivery of high value material or those in critical supply should be timed on an as needed basis for delivery.
 - ✓ Materials and equipment should be spot checked frequently. Empty cartons should not be allowed to accumulate as they may be used to carry supplies or material off the job site. Trash removal should be supervised so tools and materials cannot be hidden in containers and then removed from the job site.
 - **Supervisory Personnel Should Control Keys**
The control of keys is essential on a construction job site. Keys should be issued to as few people as possible. The company crime prevention coordinator or his/her representative should maintain a record of issued keys. Included in this record or log should be a listing of the type of key issued, to whom, on what date and for what purpose. Unissued keys should be secured and extra keys should be kept to a minimum. Keys should not be hidden on the job site and key control numbers should be removed from padlocks. To prevent unauthorized duplication, keys can be "plugged" with a rivet through the bow as a means of preventing alignment needed for machine duplication.
 - **Lock or Guard Gates When Not in Use**
Gates to the construction job site should be kept to a minimum. Strange or unrecognized vehicles on the job site should be challenged. If possible and practical to do so, uniformed guards should be utilized during working hours to check vehicles entering and leaving the job site. Gates should be closed and locked at night and on weekends.
 - **Secure Tools and Equipment when Not in Use**
Storage sheds or fenced areas should be provided on the job site for the secure storage of tools and equipment. When vehicular equipment is not in use, their cabs should be locked and ignition keys removed. Use metal shields on equipment windows to reduce vandalism. Oil and gas tank caps should be locked. Machines can be disabled with hidden ignition cutout switches.
 - Construction equipment should be engraved or marked in at least two (2) obvious and one hidden location. Use a hardened steel punch or etching tool to mark the serial numbers on the equipment. Report the loss of construction equipment to the police immediately.

- **Not All Thefts are From the Outside**
Gang boxes and supply sheds should be locked at all times. To avoid losses, the company should maintain a good tool “check in and out” system.
- **Encourage Employees to Mark Their Own Tools**
Using either die stamps or etching tools (made available by the company) employees on the job site should be strongly encouraged or even required to mark with an identification number their personal tools.
- **Lighting the Construction Job Site**
The effective use of lighting can be an effective deterrent to theft and vandalism on the construction job site. It is particularly effective in deterring the casual or impulse offender. Among the points on the job site that should be highlighted by lighting are the office trailer(s), equipment storage trailer(s), material storage yard and any equipment storage areas. These areas should be illuminated to a minimum of one foot-candle at ground level. Ideally, these areas should be visible from the most heavily traveled road bordering the construction job site.
Lighting systems triggered by a motion detector or a passive infrared sensor are also recommended for the job site. Such lighting gives the impression an intrusion has been detected and may also warn neighbors of potential intruders. Lighting on the job site should be periodically checked to insure it is appropriate and operative.
- **Fencing on the Job Site**
Fencing is particularly important on the construction job site. Ideally, the entire job site should be enclosed in sturdy fencing. If it is not practical to enclose the entire job site, at a minimum the area around trailers and material storage should be enclosed. If possible, there should only be one or two accesses or gates through the job site fencing. This makes access control easier. Chain link fencing topped by multiple strands of barbed wire is recommended. Chain link fencing allows for surveillance by security patrols, police and by neighbors. Special attention should be given to the fencing of areas used to store hazardous materials poisons, solvents, explosives, flammables, etc.
It is recommended that employee’s either park their personal vehicles outside the construction fence or have a specifically designated parking area within the fence. The objective of this recommendation is to minimize the theft of tools, material and equipment.
- **Alarm Systems**
Electronic alarm systems can be an effective means of providing security on the job site, particularly for office and storage trailers or for material storage areas. Portable alarm systems are available that will detect motion, activate lights and sound alarms. Unless are very isolated, it is recommended that alarms sound locally. This may serve to scare off the perpetrator and draw the attention of a neighbor or passer-by. Alarms can also activate telephone calls to the contractor, private security services or the local police with a pre-recorded message. Before making such alarm installations, however, the local law enforcement agency should be contacted to insure there is no law or policy prohibiting alarm installations that make calls directly to them.
- **Security Companies and Guard Dogs**
It may be advisable to employ the services of a credible, bonded and insured security company either to maintain guard staff on-site or to make periodic patrols of the construction job site. Police departments often do not have the staff to make periodic patrols of the construction job sites or may be tied up dealing with emergencies or other priorities. An advantage of using a contract private security service is that they can be given access to patrol inside the job site as well as the perimeter. They can also be given the responsibility for checking lighting and alarm systems on the job site, as well as the integrity of fencing.
Guard dogs are usually not recommended on the construction job site. The guard dog may not be able to differentiate between authorized or unauthorized persons. If used on the job site, guard dogs should be contained within a strictly off limits area.

- **General Security Recommendations**

Enlist the support of employees in minimizing theft and vandalism. Explain to them the consequences and that insurance carried by the company either has a deductible for coverage or does not cover pilferage of tools and material on the job site.

Report all vandalism and theft to the appropriate law enforcement agency immediately. Have serial numbers and information about markings on the equipment available when the responding officer(s) arrive. Make sure there is a complete record of model and serial numbers of all equipment assigned to the project.

If possible, remove graffiti from the job site as soon as possible. Graffiti often spawns or encourages further graffiti.

“No Trespassing” signs should be prominently displayed on fencing or the perimeter of the job site. Such signs discourage unauthorized intrusion onto the job site and if correctly worded aids in the prosecution of apprehended trespassers. “No Trespassing” signs and other warnings of danger can help protect the company from liability exposure for possible injuries to strangers or trespassers. The local law enforcement agency or an attorney may be consulted for appropriate wording of warning signs. Such “No Trespassing” and/or warning signs need to be easy to read and large enough to be seen from a distance.