INTRODUCTION:
On the evening of July 21, 2000, a clandestine group from the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) entered the grounds of the USDA Forest Service’s Forestry Sciences Laboratory in Rhinelander, Wisconsin and through vandalism inflicted more than $500,000 worth of damage on field experiments and vehicles. The loss was a setback for researchers who were seeking to develop faster growing and more disease-resistant strains of the *Populus* genus. Personnel at the lab reviewed and modified their security protocols in order to increase awareness of future potential security breaches.

SECURITY BREACH / DAMAGE:
The ELF marauders entered the research station premises before midnight on July 21, 2000. They proceeded to a grove of hybrid poplar trees and began to axe down the smaller trees and girdle the larger stems. In addition, the intruders spray painted several facility vehicles that were parked nearby. Messages on the cars and vans expressed the group’s displeasure with what they assumed were “genetic engineering” experiments. Two thirds of the experimental planting were destroyed, and further damage would have occurred had it not been for a temporary worker who was camping on the grounds of the station. Upon returning to his campsite, the worker surprised the vandals and chased them off into the darkness. Subsequent investigations by county, state, and federal law officials have yielded no arrests.

The destroyed trees were part of a 20-year-long tree improvement research project that employed traditional plant breeding methods. Aiming to improve growth and disease resistance, researchers crossed various genotypes of eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) with western black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*). The experiments yielded valuable results and improved poplar strains were being utilized in a variety of conservation and commercial uses. Direct hybridization was used to obtain the crosses; highly sophisticated procedures used to transplant genes directly (i.e. genetic engineering) were never employed.

The Forestry Sciences Laboratory is located in a rural setting among the gently rolling forest and farmland of north central Wisconsin. Because the lab is a federal facility, the grounds were open, and the public frequented the site. Prior to the July 2000 incident, few if any security procedures were in place, and this policy underlined the “friendly neighbor” image that the Forest Service was conveying to the public. Investigators later surmised that ELF members were free to survey the facility and probably had done so during the weeks preceding the incident.

ACTIONS TAKEN:
The facility’s management team realized that it needed an effective, affordable security strategy that would fit in with the organization’s community goals. Security officials from Region 9 were summoned to assess the current security situation and make recommendations for improvement. Working with the team, they developed the following policy:

- Security should be viewed as everyone’s responsibility, with awareness being the key point. In this respect, the security program greatly resembled the facility’s highly successful safety program. Periodic training was provided, and all employees were encouraged to become more aware of their surroundings and of things or people that seemed out of place.
- Reporting and documentation procedures were developed. All employees were required to wear identification badges, and visitors were issued badges while on the premises. Strict procedures for physically securing the facility such as locking doors and windows were developed and enforced.
- Physical alterations to improve security on the property were made. Changes included improving outdoor lighting to reduce excessively shadowed areas. Shrubs and plantings close to buildings were removed so as to increase clear lines of sight along the structures. Fencing was an option that was ruled out, in that it might have created an image contrary to the community-friendly relations the Forest Service strived to achieve.
- Guards were hired to patrol the premises. The guard schedules were not posted to employees and remain a confidential matter among management.

COMMENT:
If a facility does not have a formal security committee, it should consider combining security issues with an existing safety committee. The Rhinelander Forestry Sciences Laboratory has successfully employed this strategy. Security and safety are closely related, in that incident prevention relies so much on training and awareness.

Paul M. Klocko
FRA Consultant

Information supplied by:
Deb Dietzman
North Central Experiment Station
USDA Forest Service
1992 Folwell
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108
651/649-5031