“HARMLESS” JOY RIDE DAMAGES EQUIPMENT

INTRODUCTION: In November 2002, a logger was traveling to his job when he came across a wheeled loader turned on its side and the road blocked with a substantial amount of dirt. He contacted the owner of the equipment, who immediately came out to the site. They then called the state police to come out and investigate. The machine was checked for fingerprints, but none was found, as the person was likely wearing gloves while operating the equipment.

DAMAGE: The vandals had started the loader and taken it for a “joy ride” in the area. After pushing over several trees, they then started digging in the nearby gravel pit and dumping it on the road. They had the road completely blocked when the person operating the equipment apparently turned too sharp with a full bucket, and the loader tipped over on its side.

The machine sustained damage to the transmission and tires, totaling approximately $16,000. Additionally, the logger that found the loader reported that his logging equipment had also been tampered with, but that no damage had been detected.

ACTIONS TAKEN: Approximately one year later, an individual was arrested on a theft charge. As part of his plea bargain, he offered information as to who was responsible for the “joy ride” incident. That person was then apprehended and charged.

COMMENTS: The person responsible had on several occasions taken other equipment in that area on “joy rides” but had not caused any serious damage. Consequently, most of these incidents had not been reported. In this case, it appeared that the person was not intending to damage the loader and that it had tipped over “accidentally.”

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:
- Any time a piece of equipment has been tampered with or vandalized, it should be reported immediately to both law enforcement and woodlands personnel. Together, they
may be able to identify a pattern, which may ultimately lead to the arrest of the person or persons responsible.

- Protect the crime scene until law enforcement arrives. Be careful not to obscure evidence such as footprints or vehicle tracks.

- Check all lubrication points closely for signs of abrasives or other foreign substances. Don’t overlook the possibility of an environmental protestor/saboteur looking to cause significant damage to your equipment.

- Even if the incident appears minor, it still should be considered a serious matter and reported. Treating it as just teenagers out having a little fun may allow the problem to escalate to a point where serious damage or even injury could result. In view of today’s liability laws, it could potentially create a significant legal and financial burden on the company.