PREVENTION OF FOREST OPERATIONS EQUIPMENT THEFT AND VANDALISM

INTRODUCTION:  Listed below are some recommendations and options intended to prevent or discourage the theft or vandalism of logging equipment.  This list should not be considered “the final word.”  Owners and operators must conduct their own risk assessment and use their own good judgment in the protection of their assets. Ideas are organized into four components:

• Prior to Routine Operations
• During Routine Operations
• For High Risk Circumstances or Very Expensive Equipment
• After an Incident

PRIOR TO OPERATIONS:
1) All heavy equipment should be marked by the owner with unique, hidden serial numbers. Numbers stamped by the manufacturer are likely to be known to and removed by a serious thief. These numbers can be stamped into or welded onto the inner frame or other major components. In the event your equipment is stolen and recovered, one must prove ownership beyond reasonable doubt in order to recover it. It may be painted and altered subsequent to the theft.

2) Take photographs of equipment. All valuable property insured or not, should be very thoroughly photographed. If a truck, trailer, loader, dozer or skidder is stolen from an operation, a good quality, clear photograph of the equipment could be posted at regional scale houses. Printed or digital images must be secured in a safe place.

3) A customized ‘kill switch’ should be installed on each piece of heavy equipment. Most mechanics will know how to install switches in the electrical or fuel system that is known only to owners and operators.

4) Purchase equipment that will effectively lock steering wheels or doors on equipment. There are several effective locking devices that can make it more difficult to steal heavy equipment. Kryptonite locks and The Club range in cost from $40-$100. Kryptonite locks can be found at www.tonker.com or ordered by phone at 1-800-953-0538. The Club can be found at Wal-Mart stores.

5) Insurance:  All valuable property essential to business operations should be insured against theft, arson and vandalism.

6) Acquire professionally made signs that basically state the following: “Do Not Enter – This Area Subject to Electronic Surveillance – Violators Will Be Prosecuted.” Some thieves and vandals will be discouraged from mischief by the threat of discovery. Plan to post these signs near equipment when staged in remote areas.

7) Consider a unique, custom paint job for heavy equipment. A yellow ‘Cat’ attracts no attention; a purple skidder on a lo-boy at a truck stop would be remembered.

DURING ROUTINE OPERATIONS:
8) Owners, operators and truck drivers must remain alert to all circumstances. Some areas are known for theft and vandalism. There are warning signs to be alert to, such as: unfriendly neighbors and hostile recreational users, any signs of marijuana or drug labs, and conflicts between the landowner and lease holders. When the risk is greater, a prudent person will invest more in preventative measures.
9) Close and lock all gates. Temporary gates can be erected with a small investment. Any gate or barrier must not be unsafe: Cable gates are not recommended.

10) Owners should become acquainted and remain on good terms with neighbors, hunt clubs, game wardens and anyone else who might alert owners to potential trouble. A friendly conversation with joining landowners can be a great investment in security. If concerns are shared with game wardens and other local law enforcement officers, they might be able to increase patrol activity in areas near operations.

11) Hide or scatter logging equipment away from the loading deck. Vandals or thieves can not “joyride” on equipment or steal equipment they can not locate.

12) Post “No Trespassing” signs at the entrance to the property the operation is on. This will discourage some traffic, but not all.

13) Fuel trailers, equipment bins and all small tools must be locked up or removed from the site.

FOR HIGH RISK CIRCUMSTANCES OR VERY EXPENSIVE EQUIPMENT:

14) Move equipment to a safe area. If a local resident resides nearby, equipment may be able to efficiently be moved a short distance to a safe place.

15) Purchase covert camera systems to monitor logging equipment. Cost will vary from $400 to $9,000 and more. Forest Watch (479-474-0802), First Witness (800-880-1521) and other vendors offer a wide range of options. Cameras may record what happened but WILL NOT PREVENT AN INCIDENT.

16) Purchase a system that activates either an audible alarm, illumination or both if trespassers enter within a certain distance of equipment. This, in conjunction with warning signs, will discourage a greater number of vandals and thieves.

17) Purchase systems that monitor any movement of equipment and alert owners with a phone call or page. The effectiveness of this system will be restricted by the quality of cell phone or satellite coverage in the area. Other systems, like “On Star,” will monitor the location of equipment if it is removed from a site. Vendors include Micro Technology Services (800-644-8184), GPSNext (623-266-4688) and Satellite Security Systems (877-437-4199).

18) Hire a security guard. This may be the most effective and the most costly method, if utilized in the long term. Some contractors have utilized guards when working in high risk circumstances for short periods of time. Guards should be qualified and equipped to do the job safely. Licensed security guards will cost $10-$20 per hour.

AFTER AN INCIDENT:

19) Notify local law enforcement immediately. Secure and preserve the crime scene. Some evidence will escape the attention of laymen. Tire marks, footprints and trash left by the perpetrators might be very important if they are preserved.

20) Carefully inspect all other equipment to insure they are not secretly vandalized.

21) Contact insurance carrier if that is appropriate.

22) Consider posting rewards and alerts in the local area. Reward posters must be carefully worded. All payments must be at your discretion. Substantial awards ($5,000 or more) will be worthwhile if such payments lead to the recovery of equipment and a successful prosecution.

23) Consider posting alerts with photographs of stolen equipment in local scale houses and truck stops. Most people are honest and despise a thief. If they can help out an honest contractor, they are inclined to do so.

24) If operations continue in the same area, increased preventative and recovery measures should certainly be considered.

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Fig. 3: Machines equipped with GPS units may aid in location and recovery efforts.