FUEL THEFT ON JOB SITES

Fuel: theft

INTRODUCTION: As fuel prices have increased over the past few years the fuel that powers woods equipment has become a target for thieves. A small logging job consisting of a skidder, a feller buncher, a loader, and one portable fuel drum could easily have 750 gallons of fuel in the woods. At $3.40 per gallon, that raises the potential loss to over $2,500.

SECURITY BREACH/DAMAGE: A logger returning to the logging job one morning discovered his log loader out of fuel. Upon closer inspection, he discovered that someone had cut the fuel line and drained the fuel from the tank. Apparently the thief did not have capacity to handle all of the fuel in the tank and drove off, letting the rest of the fuel drain onto the ground. This theft cost the logger downtime for repairs to the fuel line, the value of the fuel stolen, and costs associated with the clean-up and disposal of the contaminated soil.

RECOGNITION: The logger reported the theft to the local law enforcement officers, and a report of the theft was filed. However, with no witnesses and a lack of evidence, there was little that could be done.

ACTIONS TAKEN: Taking the advice of local law enforcement officers, the logger installed motion-activated cameras in an attempt to monitor traffic into the job site. In addition, gates were closed during off hours to impede access to the site.

COMMENTS: Loggers routinely operate in remote locations that are difficult to monitor, giving potential thieves the perception that theft is low-risk. Loggers should work to change that perception by implementing some of the recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that organizations with exposure to the risks of fuel theft develop a security plan which may include these daily defense measures:

1) Securely lock equipment cab doors and provide locks for service access doors, fuel tanks, and master switches.

2) Block vehicle access and prevent driving to within close proximity of equipment. Use gates when possible or use barriers of cut trees to block roads.

3) In the case of a fuel trailer, consider pulling it out of the woods during off hours. If that is not feasible, then remove the pumping mechanism and secure the trailer to a stationary object.
4) Maintain a record of all the gallons pumped from the tank. This will not only provide an accurate record of fuel usage by equipment and individuals, but it will also serve as a record that law enforcement and insurance companies can use, should a theft occur.

5) To prevent fuel lines being cut, limit access to engine compartments. If that is not an option, replace the existing fuel lines with steel braided fuel lines.

6) To prevent siphoning of fuel, install an anti-siphon screen in the neck of each tank. This device prevents hoses from being inserted into the tank.

7) When possible, leave equipment near the homes of friendly neighbors who are willing to observe the machine periodically. Do not park equipment next to public roads if it cannot be easily observed. Otherwise, leave the equipment as far back in the woods as possible and avoid parking two or three machines together in one place.

8) Install surveillance cameras to record all visitors to the site, and post signs at the entrance to job, indicating that the premises are under surveillance.

9) Installation of motion-activated lights on the job site could also be a good deterrent. Motion-activated alarms on equipment can provide warnings if equipment is being abused.

10) In areas known to be trouble spots, consider hiring a local person to patrol the area at night (preferably a retired or off-duty law enforcement officer).

11) Camp out on the site.

12) Have bogus signs printed, stating that the area is under surveillance by “XYZ Security Services” and post signs in obvious areas. (Buy cheap signs, since they will be stolen or vandalized!)

13) Notify the local sheriff's office, since they may be able to patrol the area more often if they know to expect trouble. They may even use the situation to increase surveillance, hoping to catch a habitual offender in the act of committing a crime.

Tim Beaulieu, Prentiss & Carlisle Inc.
Aaron Gilland, DRM, Inc.

Reviewed by:
Joel Swanton,
Northeast Region Manager