HERBICIDE THEFT

Timber Security: theft

INTRODUCTION: Herbicide theft represents a significant financial and legal risk. Herbicides are expensive and if not handled properly can pose risks due to potential spills and environmental hazards. Most foresters recognize the costs associated with herbicides and their application and realize the environmental concerns posed by their use. However, they may not realize the risks of leaving herbicides unguarded or unprotected, whether in a storage facility or field location.

SECURITY BREACH/DAMAGE: A forestry herbicide distributor used a gooseneck horse trailer to transport drums and containers to customers' field locations. One evening, the distributor loaded the trailer with the next day's delivery and parked the trailer behind the company warehouse in preparation for an early departure the next morning. He locked the trailer's doors but did not lock the trailer's fifth wheel hitch. The trailer contained Arsenal, Accord SP, Chopper, and Finale herbicides.

Sometime during the night, thieves drove into the unfenced parking lot, hooked up the trailer, and drove away with both the trailer and herbicides. The total value of the herbicides was $42,000. The value of the trailer was $6,000.

RECOGNITION: The theft was noticed the following morning when the distributor prepared to depart for the field.

ACTIONS TAKEN: The theft was reported to the police. The thieves needed a truck with a fifth-wheel hitch in order to move the trailer, and tire tracks from a dual-wheeled pickup truck were noticed in the parking lot. An immediate notification went out via broadcast e-mail utilizing APA's Security Alert network. APA members and foresters in the Security Alert network were notified of the theft and asked to be on the alert for these herbicides being sold at a “special price.”

Within two days, the herbicides were found by a neighbor who saw the drums and cartons on the side of an industrial forest road and called the police. The thieves, wanting only the trailer, had emptied it and dumped the herbicide containers without regard for their value or potential environmental hazard.

No herbicide had been spilled. All the containers were recovered undamaged and without further incident. The police also located the trailer still hitched to the dual wheeled pickup and were waiting to question the owner when he returned from an out-of-town trip. They also wanted him to answer questions about a stolen four-wheeler and other equipment found on his property.

Multiple suspects have been arrested and charged. In addition, the suspects were believed to have been involved in multiple thefts in four states. As of this date, over $750,000 worth of stolen property has been recovered, some of which is suspected to have been stolen from various forest products mill sites. The suspects have also been connected with another trailer theft that occurred in 1998.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
1) Restrict access to or lock up all herbicides overnight.
2) Don't leave herbicide containers in the back of unoccupied pickup trucks or trailers.
3) Recognize that herbicides are attractive to others. Persons without a professional working knowledge of herbicides may be interested in using them to control weeds in their gardens or driveways and assume that the industrial strength herbicides that foresters use are the same they can buy in the home and garden store. They may just want to “borrow” some for their home use. Such use presents the owners with a massive liability and community relations issue.
4) Report any theft promptly, so that others can be on the alert for “extra” herbicides in the distribution system.

APA's Security Alert system utilizes broadcast fax and e-mail to get the word out quickly to member companies and Southern Forest Products Security Group personnel. To issue a Security Alert, contact APA Division Foresters Mike Wetzel at 803/356-0709, e-mail wetzel88@earthlink.net, or Bruce Alt at 601/924-1830, e-mail balt@woodcom.com.

COMMENT: Herbicides are expensive, but their initial cost is minimal compared to the legal liability a company assumes if they are used or applied incorrectly. Think how you would behave if someone gave you an ounce of pure silver. What would you do with it? Leave it in the open bed of a pickup truck? Probably not. You would probably take it home and put it in a safe or at least keep it safely out of sight and secured. Yet the ounce of silver is worth less than $5.00 in today's market. Now consider a five-gallon can of Arsenal valued at $2,200 or a three-pound container of Oust valued at $500. How are you going to protect them?

Physical security measures play an important role in preventing crime. Nationally, crimes against property (theft) from burglary represent over 90% of all reported crimes and include at least 50% of corporate and industrial externally caused losses.

Security can never be absolute, even in maximum security facilities. We have to accept some risks and understand that these risks are always changing. The answer to constantly changing risks is to constantly address new vulnerabilities. By determining these vulnerable points in an organization's structure, managers can take effective preventive action to physically secure or harden them.

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