CHIP MILL PROTEST IN PENNSYLVANIA

INTRODUCTION: On October 20, 1998, approximately 15-20 protesters staged a demonstration at the entrance gate to a contract chip mill located in Pennsylvania. The protesters claimed to represent Allegheny Earth First! and the Native Forest Network. One protester was suspended about 20 feet off the ground from a tripod made of steel tubing, and another protester fastened a U-shaped motorcycle lock around her neck and to one leg of the tripod. This leg of the tripod passed through where the entrance road gate halves came together. None of the protesters were from the local area. Their goal was to shut the chip mill down for a period of time and to receive press coverage. The group and the protest were very well organized, with specific duties assigned to certain individuals.

ACTIONS TAKEN: At 5:30 a.m. on the morning of the protest, a chip mill employee arrived at the chip mill entrance and was surprised to see the protesters. In accordance with the mill’s action plan, he left the property and immediately called the Pennsylvania State Police, who arrived at 6 a.m. Next, he called the chip mill manager and the wood procurement manager. After the managers arrived, they diverted the waiting pulpwood, chip, and bark trucks that were lined up along the mill entrance road and the state highway. They requested that truckers and wood suppliers stay away until they were contacted again later. The wood procurement manager informed the police officers that the property owner intended to press charges against anyone trespassing, and that the company wanted the protesters removed from the property immediately. When the police announced this, all but the two protesters attached to the tripod left the property; however, they stayed along the highway right-of-way. The company contracted with a security service to videotape the entire event. At one point, a group of about 15 people sympathetic to the chipping business (truckers, local residents, etc.) had to be separated from the protesters, because discussions had become heated. The managers were able to divert all the trucks and separate the sympathizers from the demonstrators before the TV and radio stations arrived later in the morning. (The media had received notice of the protest through a News Release faxed by Earth First! and the Native Forest Network which promised them a “Photo Opportunity”). After the TV reporters filmed the scene and interviewed the protest group’s assigned media spokesperson outside the property boundaries, an individual unlocked the motorcycle lock, while the protester suspended from the tripod slowly lowered himself to the ground. Both individuals were arrested immediately and charged with criminal trespass, disorderly conduct, and failure of disorderly persons to disperse. The protesters along the road were allowed to return to disassemble the tripod, but the police confiscated all equipment including the tripod and rappelling ropes. Charges against the two protesters were bound over to court. However, the protesters did not appear in court to plead, so a bench warrant for their arrest has been issued.
RECOMMENDATIONS: Company managers successfully handled the demonstration with no injuries and avoided confrontations which could have received media coverage. Some of the keys to turning the incident into a fairly minor one were:

• Good communication and co-operation with the state police.
• Chip mill employees had been previously informed of what to do and what to expect.
• Employees avoided direct conversation with protesters regarding their issues. (Occasionally the protesters would try to engage employees in friendly conversation. As soon as the protesters raised the issue of harvesting, however, their dialogue became much more heated. The wood procurement manager quickly cut off all conversation at that point.)
• Firmly informing police of the company's intention to prosecute trespassers, and ensuring that the police continued to enforce the law for the duration of the protest and keep the “protest support team” from wandering back to the tripod.
• Making sure “No Trespassing” signs are visible.
• Controlling mill employees, truckers, and people sympathetic to our “cause” and keeping them away from the protesters.
• Talking to reporters away from the protesters to minimize photo opportunities with protesters in the background.

After the protest, employees developed a list of additional recommendations based on the experience from this demonstration:

• Make sure the chip mill has enough company personnel on site. At least two people are needed to deal with the event (i.e., talk with police, direct bystanders, etc.) and another person to communicate with the media.
• Develop statements in advance to address each of the issues that the protesters are likely to bring up with the media. These statements must get the key point across within one or two sentences. Trying to educate the reporters too much may not result in the sound bites you want. They will edit the information and keep what they want.
• Designate a person to listen in the background to the protesters’ discussions with the media and to report back. Reporters had asked, “What do you have to say about their claims?” Because the wood procurement manager was busy managing the entire situation, he was not sure what the protesters were claiming specifically to the reporter.
• Look at a protest event as an opportunity to convey your message. Remember, the main purpose of the demonstrators is to obtain press coverage through a disruption of your operations.
• It can be useful to view the members of the media as customers wanting a product. Company employees noticed that the TV and newspaper reporters seemed to be competing with each other for the story. Give them the “product” you want them to receive.
• See APA Security Alerts 96-Q-7, 97-Q-4, and 98-Q-6 for additional recommendations.

Dan Evans
Wood Procurement Manager
Willamette Industries, Inc.
100 Center Street
Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania 15845
814/965-6399

REVIEWED BY:
Security Alert Advisory Committee
Southern Forest Products Security Group
  Mike Yeager (Chairman)
  Champion International Corp.
  Walt Adams, Boise Cascade Corporation
  Ben Cobb, USDA Forest Service
  Randy Cofield, International Paper
  David Long, Alabama River Woodlands, Inc.
  John Moore, Potlatch Corporation
  Jerry Stuckey, Westvaco Corporation
  Rex Woodson, USDA Forest Service
  Rick Meyer, Appalachian Technical Division Forester