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Site Protection Guidelines

Overnight, your job site could fall victim to theft or vandalism. These guidelines can help you protect and secure your work and your equipment.

by Chad Preston



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Maybe it's happened to you. Your crews worked hard the day before in the hot sun only to return in the morning to find their work vandalized or equipment missing.

"It's a disaster for the crew, coming in in the morning and everything's torn up or gone," says Norris L. Beren, executive director of the Emergency Preparedness Educational Institute and author of *When Disaster Strikes Home!*

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

According to Beren, there isn't a foolproof method to keep vandals and thieves out, but there are steps you can take to protect yourself. He says the best thing to do is keep things "out of sight, out of mind." He says that you invite people in if you don't hide things away, secure them properly or don't supply enough light to the area. The idea is that you're trying to deter people from coming on the premises.

Fencing can work if it is a long-term or large project, but the simple posting of "No Trespassing" signs also gives you a legal basis to do something if you experience a loss.

Beren also recommends that you request local law enforcement stop by to check up on the site during its patrols. If you can afford it, he suggests using security guards, if the project requires it. It can be expensive but it's cheaper than the deductible paid if equipment is stolen or plantings are damaged.

Jason Cupp, chairman of Highland Outdoor in Olathe, Kan., and treasurer of the [Professional Landcare Network](#) (PLANET), advises taking everything possible with you when you leave for the day—an obvious solution, perhaps, but effective no less.

"Take everything with you on a daily basis," he says. "The best way to protect [your equipment and supplies] is to transfer it via trailer or truck each day."

Highland Outdoor uses trailers on longer projects that secure equipment and materials overnight on-site if they can't be transported elsewhere. In some instances, Cupp says you also might have an existing structure on-site, like a garage, that can be used to store materials.

Cupp says that contractors can be too trusting sometimes. They leave their tools and materials on site and unsecured, thinking that no one will disturb them, only to find that they are gone in the morning. This happened to Highland in its infancy. Some supplies and small hand tools were stolen because they were not locked up, Cupp says.

Be Insured

"Vandalism and theft is always a major issue," says Jim Bilinski, president of The American Plantsman Insurance Brokers Ltd. in Barrington, Ill. "If you're securing your materials, it deters, but doesn't completely stop it."

If you don't have it, think about getting insurance on your equipment and supplies. No matter how high the fence or how tough the padlock, things still can be taken. Bilinski says he's seen fenced-in sites that were broken into, and equipment padlocked behind trailer doors disappeared after locks were cut. But theft isn't the only issue. Bilinski says that more vandalism claims are filed than thefts, and sand in your gasoline or engine crankcase can be just as disastrous as a missing mower.

It's common sense, but the more difficult you make it on vandals and thieves, the better. Remember to store things inside and it helps if your site is in a well-traveled, well-lit area.

Bilinski says 80 to 85 percent of landscaping contractors insure their equipment. Whether you should

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"It costs money to do the right thing, but it's cheaper than the alternative," Beren says. "It's better to utilize a good risk management procedure upfront. Everything requires an investment in time and money, but it's less expensive than doing nothing."