Editor’s Note: This is the first of a two-part article on securing your equipment on a jobsite. The second half of this article will appear in next monthly issue.

News stories tell a grim story about theft and vandalism in the workplace, and construction sites are no exception.

Wall and ceiling contractors are very much concerned with theft. Missing tools, materials and equipment, particularly mobile machinery, cost contractors more than $1 million dollars each year. CNA reports that 60 percent of the property claims reported and nearly 50 percent of the dollar loss in the AWCI insurance program during the last four years was a result of theft.

While you may not be able to keep professional thieves from stealing your property, you can make it extremely difficult for them, and virtually impossible for amateurs.

The layout or location of a street, bridge or construction jobsite may make devising a security planning difficult. Yet a jobsite without guards, fencing, adequate lighting or controlled exits makes a very easy target. But don’t give up. There are effective security measures you can take to protect your company resources.

Poor Security Affects Everyone

Remember, when jobsites have inadequate security, contractors and their subcontractors are exposed to the following:

- Theft by employees and the public resulting in loss of material and time delays to procure replacements.
- Vandalism by employees, former employees, local gangs or children.
- Arson or accidental fires caused by vandals, vagrants or children.
- Injuries or fatalities to children who wander onto an unprotected construction site.

Theft Costs You in Many Ways

Some contractors ignore jobsite theft or decide not to take action against it. They simply add stolen property cost to job costs. These direct costs can be substantial—as much as 3 percent to 5 percent of the job cost, according to one estimate. But there are also some significant indirect costs of jobsite theft:

- When stolen tools aren’t available, delays inevitably occur and productivity drops.
- Many contractors carry high deductibles to help control their insurance costs. Often the replacement expense of stolen tools falls below deductible levels, forcing the company to absorb the costs.
- When theft is rampant at a jobsite, employees’ tools are likely to be stolen. Some union contracts hold employers responsible for theft of employees’ tools.
- Employer-tolerated theft hurts employee morale. Honest workers don’t like working when theft is ignored. Poor morale leads to poor productivity and friction on the job.

Even if you are willing to endure the
direct costs of theft, you may want to consider the indirect costs.

**General Guidelines for Improving Security**

**Make Jobsite Security a Joint Venture.** Ideally, responsibility for initiation and funding of a good vandalism and theft prevention program should be shared by the general contractor and subcontractors, since each has exposure to substantial loss.

The subcontractor is normally not in a position to stipulate what security safeguards are necessary for the protection of his equipment unless an agreement has been made with the general contractor.

A good program can be developed in the early stages of the construction project, which will involve both in sharing the cost and responsibility.

**Get Help from Law Enforcement.** Well before you break ground or move in your equipment, you should meet with officials of the appropriate law enforcement agency.

You may want to give them the details of your construction project, type of construction, work schedule, project starting time and the expected date of completion. Names and phone numbers of key personnel and contact information during nonworking hour are also essential.

Keep the police posted on such things as delivery of critical material and unusual jobsite activities that might require special attention. Tell the police how your equipment is specially marked for identification.

Ask the local law enforcement agency to conduct a crime prevention survey of your site. If you are going to use security personnel, it is sometimes good public relations to hire off-duty law enforcement personnel.

**Speak Out on Theft!** “Everybody is doing it. The company doesn’t seem to mind.”

That’s likely to be the rationale for theft, even among typically honest employees, when an employer doesn’t clearly state opposition to theft and act to prevent it. You may assume employees know you oppose theft, but they...
may believe you don’t care if you don’t take specific anti-theft steps. Consider the following:

Conduct meetings and give handout materials to let employees know you expect honesty on the jobsite.

Explain your policy on the “gray areas”—taking scrap lumber or cut-off pipes, personal use of company vehicles or “borrowing” tools for overnight or weekend use.

- Ask employees to report theft to management via a phone number
they can use after hours and on weekends.

Many would-be thieves will be deterred by the knowledge that someone can turn them in anonymously. But before acting on anonymous tips, discuss the case with your lawyer.

**Encourage Security Suggestions from Your Employees.** Employees can play a vital part in reducing losses of small tools and materials by constant surveillance of your jobsite. In preventing vandalism and theft, they can work with you as well as for you.

Many small day-to-day losses must be paid from profits. Don’t be afraid to let your workers know that they could be fired if they are caught stealing. Most labor contracts contain a clause listing dishonesty as one of the just causes for which you may fire an employee.

Prosecute those who steal to let other employees know you mean business.

**Involve Neighbors in Watching Your Jobsite.** Neighbors and their children can become efficient watchdogs of your project during evening hours and on weekends if you solicit their help in a friendly way.

Contact neighbors in the jobsite’s immediate area. Don’t overemphasize your concern about stopping crimes. Instead, stress the ways you are promoting safety so their children won’t be tempted to play in the area and get hurt. This communication can also be effectively done through a local mailer campaign.

While they may be sympathetic to your security problems, your neighbors are also interested in your efforts to ensure their safety.

**About the Author**
Don Brown is a CNA loss-control account manager who has more than two decades of management experience in CNA field operations. He currently manages loss-control services for 12 national associations, including The Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries-International.