

# Protect your plant

As well as safeguarding assets, adopting measures to combat machinery theft can bring other business benefits.



All GAP's dumpers are registered with Datatag.

Efforts to combat plant theft date back a considerable time. To summarise, the Plant Theft Advisory Group (PTAG) was formed in 1996 as a Home Office advisory body, but progress was slow without a central database of registered equipment, such as exists for motor vehicles, and identifying stolen plant was difficult for non-construction professionals.

The issue was highlighted by the Metropolitan Police in 2006 when considering security for construction sites which would be hosting the 2012 Olympic Games. A PTAG sub-group was formed, including stakeholders like manufacturers, plant hirers, utilities and insurers, to discuss a national registration and marking scheme supported by a 24-hour call centre. This led to the Plant & Agricultural National Intelligence Unit (Panlu), a database for logging stolen machines, and Cesar, the Construction Equipment Security and Registration Scheme, developed by Datatag ID.

Cesar, which has been adopted by many manufacturers and can lead to lower insurance premiums, protects equipment with visible and invisible deterrents and markings. More than 200,000 machines now have this security, and such items are now claimed to be six times less likely to be stolen and four times more likely to be recovered. The Construction Industries Theft Solutions (CITS) group, which disseminates best practice information, suggests that a sensible minimum precaution when purchasing new plant is that it has Cesar markings, an immobiliser, and a unique machine key (which could be for the immobiliser).



Cesar plates carry a specific ID number for each machine.

In the past, some hirers gave additional security measures a low priority, seeing the person hiring the equipment as being responsible, but this is changing, according to Iain Anderson, Joint MD of GAP, who chairs the Plant Hire Steering Group. He also spoke from a hirer's perspective at the CITS Plant Theft Forum last November, on which we reported in our January/February issue. "At the conference, several manufacturers, insurers and hirers came up to me and said we should be working together more effectively to tackle theft. We held the first Steering Group meeting in February, with representatives of eight national hirers, including A-Plant, Brandon, GAP, Hewden, HSS, Nationwide Platforms, Speedy and Vp, discussing ways to reduce theft and fraudulent hires, and to urge manufacturers to make equipment harder to steal.

"Customers are driving these changes. It is not just a question of losing assets and making insurance claims. Theft causes major disruption to sites. Contractors have to undertake an audit to determine what has been stolen, which is the same for hirers if their premises are broken into. Contractors are asking hirers what they are doing to combat the problem, and manufacturers need to step up to the plate."

This is echoed by Ian Elliott, Group Head of Security for the Clancy Group, who previously served 30 years with the Metropolitan Police Specialist Crime Directorate in Scotland Yard. He is also Chairman of the CITS. "More contractors are saying that, unless machines have protection like Cesar, immobilisers and tracking devices, they will not hire it, or, if it is stolen, they cannot be held responsible. Hirers also recognise the risk of theft at their own premises, and the disruption caused.

"Today's thief is more sophisticated. We had an instance of a stolen backhoe loader that we parked on a site on a Sunday, in full view of a housing estate. Residents saw people, who they assumed to be our staff in hi-viz jackets and full PPE, working on the machine for several hours to get it running. With hindsight, the machine was obviously being over-wired and the security systems by-passed. Presumably, once they had manufactured a new loom to bypass the immobiliser and got it running, they removed it all to make it appear normal. Our driver noticed no difference on the Monday, but it was stolen by the gang after the site had closed on that day. They re-affixed their loom, drove it off and it was never recovered.

"However, the risk can be reduced. We have all equipment painted in our corporate colours, as adhesive stickers are all too easily

removed. And having unique keys for machines is not difficult to administer: after all, van drivers rarely lose theirs, and keys can be programmed for individual or multi-use as needed, so that service staff can operate many machines with the one key. The technology exists and should be used. Older machines without protection are an easy target. We also use the whole gamut of security systems to protect our sites, including man guarding and mobile CCTV systems, to prevent both external and internal theft of items ranging from diggers and dumpers, to paving slabs and aggregate."

Interest is also growing in developing a theft deterrent for small tools and equipment, such as cut-off saws and cable avoidance products, using RFID (radio frequency identification) technology with microchips inside the equipment. "Theft like this represents our biggest loss in volume terms, leading to downtime, delay and disruption," said Ian Elliott. "This is another development that will be driven by contractors."

GAP's Iain Anderson agrees. "The Plant Hire Steering Group will urge manufacturers to fit these RFID tags, so that equipment can be scanned at the point of hire and subsequently traced. Such systems

can also record data like servicing history and be used to generate paperwork, as well as deterring the counterfeiting of products. Shops and supermarkets use this technology, so why not hirers?"

And that is perhaps one of the main messages regarding theft prevention. Rather than being seen as an additional cost and a burden, security measures can reduce losses, enhance efficiency and lead to more business overall.



CCTV systems can prevent theft and pilferage.