

Protect yourself against theft

DETERMINED THIEVES CAN SOMETIMES THWART EVEN THE MOST CAREFUL CONTRACTORS. INSURANCE IS ONE WAY TO PREVENT INTERRUPTIONS TO YOUR BUSINESS.

STOLEN EQUIPMENT AND property is a huge issue in the landscape industry. After all both are left unattended, as crews finish up the job. Other times equipment is stolen right from headquarters. With thieves becoming increasingly clever — and bold — it's important to take preventative steps to protect your property. But because you can't protect against *everything* it's also critical to be covered by insurance.

Zachery Bruce, loss control manager with Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits, has seen it all.

"Thieves will actually use the insured's vehicle to hook up their trailer and drive away," says Bruce. "Typically we're able to recover the vehicle and the trailer because it's the items inside that they want. They're easier to resell without being traced."

Bruce says that a trailer left outside headquarters isn't always safe either. Even though some may park their trailers up against the building so that it's difficult to open the back doors, Bruce says there've been cases where thieves have literally cut right into the side of the trailer and unloaded it that way.

"Unless you've stored everything inside of an alarmed building with security cameras and locked doors, you aren't going to find a security method that is 100% thief-proof," says Bruce. "But fortunately there are a lot of precautions you can take. The more difficult for a thief to steal from you, the more likely they'll just move on to the next guy with no security methods in place."

One of the more commonly stolen landscape items is a zero-radius turn mower, says Bruce, because of its high resale value. Anything portable such as backpack

blowers or weed eaters are a target of theft. Bruce says it's important crews don't leave those types of items unsecured and unattended in the back of a truck. "If you don't take the time to secure those items, they could easily disappear while your crews are working."

Bruce also recommends registering high-value equipment with the National Equipment Register (**NER.net**) and getting your company name or logo on as much equipment as you can.

"If it has your name and/or logo painted on the side, a thief might not want to mess with it," he says. "They're looking for items that are easy to resell. Etching the serial number somewhere other than the data plate because that's the first thing a thief will remove. If you etch it somewhere hidden, that's something to tell law enforcement, and they can look for the etching should the piece be recovered."

Bruce says to choose carefully where you leave your equipment overnight. Simple lighting can make your facility more secure. "You also want to think about how open it is," says Bruce. "If you have trees or shrubbery blocking the property, a thief might go unnoticed," he says. "Consider cutting down large trees and keeping shrubs pruned. Some of our clients have installed heavy duty security fences and barbed wire."

But even with all of these precautions, Bruce says that determined thieves are going to find a way to get in.

"We had one case where the thief stole a company vehicle and just drove it right through the gate," he says. With Hortica, if you have business interruption coverage on your policy, the company would pay for rental of equipment until the equipment is replaced.

"If the company purchased the mulch from a distributor, it would be covered," says Bruce. "We would cover the wholesale price of the stolen product."

If equipment was stolen, it's important to file a police report and getting in touch with your insurance agent. "You can't prevent everything, but you can make yourself less of a target," Bruce says.

Payton is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

When barbed wire doesn't cut it, insurance can save the day.



RC VS. ACV

While every insurance policy is different, it is important to know whether your equipment is insured as "Replacement Cost" (RC) or "Actual Cash Value" (ACV). With a total loss, RC coverage will reimburse the full cost to replace the damaged unit with equipment of like kind and/or quality. It is important to note that with most insurance policies until you actually replace the item, only actual cash value is due. With an ACV policy your carrier owes you what that piece of equipment is worth at the time of loss. In most cases this is established utilizing the cost to replace with new equipment of like kind and/or quality less depreciation based on the age, condition and life expectancy of the equipment in question. At Hortica, if the mobile equipment is specifically scheduled on the insurance policy, a claim is settled on the RC Basis.