

# Combating Theft Calls for Layered Approach



BY MAREK KRASUSKI

The old cliché, “necessity is the mother of invention” aptly describes the state of criminal activity in the trucking industry. The sophistication and diversity of security devices continue to rise in response to the overwhelming spike in the theft of cargo, trailers, and trucks. Criminals are more high tech, daring and violent in their efforts to reap the spoils from stolen goods. According to the FBI, investigations have shown that large scale heists are supported by well organized hierarchies whose structures mirror large corporations. Leaders run regional or national operations by dispatching orders to so-called cells of thieves and brokers who, with the help of others in the distribution chain, transport goods and dump stolen merchandise onto the black market. Cargo theft is estimated to cost the transport industry \$1 billion in Canada and between \$15 and \$30 billion annually in the U.S.

What makes theft such a lucrative activity is the voracious appetite for goods of every type. Historically, thieves focused their attention on cigarettes, alcohol and portable electronic goods. Today, almost anything attracts the attention of criminals whose clandestine actions generate huge profits on loads that can easily be dumped at flea markets or in the stock rooms of merchandisers who ask no questions.

There is little evidence that the stealing trend is abating. Theft losses jumped by five percent in the first half of 2010 in the wake of multi-trailer thefts and warehouse burglaries.

Attempts to reduce theft are further thwarted by comparatively light sentences, particularly for first-time offenders, as well as the reluctance of carriers to report heists for fear of spiking insurance premiums and threats to their reputations. The high costs of hiring investigators to apprehend culprits also deter carriers from taking proactive measures.

The market has responded with an assortment of deterrents. According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, a well designed security plan should include four pillars of protection.

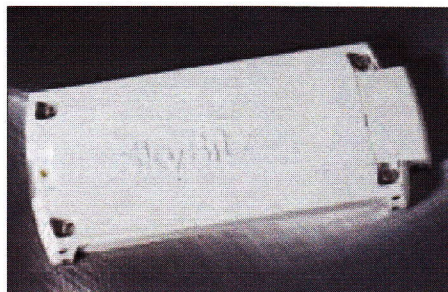
The first, known to every competent driver is common sense. Simple measures such as avoiding identification tags on key rings, parking in well lit areas, locking cargo doors and following carefully planned and high density routes are advised. The same approach should be the guiding principle around docking facilities and yards since most thefts occur on carrier properties. Companies are encouraged to hold employees responsible for their actions and to have in place practices that restrict the access of strangers to terminals and docking yards. As well, employees ought to be authorized to question any strangers on the property and inspect non-company trucks such as rental units or interlining carriers. Perimeters should have monitoring systems and adequate lighting, and trailers tightly backed against docking platforms or parked in pairs with their cargo doors abutting each other.

The second pillar comprises warning and anti-theft devices. Detectors, loud alarms, steering wheel locks and theft deterrent decals are advisable, as are fuel tank anti-siphoning accessories. Most of these popular devices fit over the road commercial trucks,

medium duty vehicles and reefer trucks. These easy-to-install products do not restrict fuelling or cause splash-back, nor can be broken or removed by thieves. An estimated 350,000 trucks in North America are equipped with anti-siphoning devices and with such precautions notwithstanding, professional thieves are innovative. These systems alone will buy only a little time and will not prevent a tenacious thief from stealing a vehicle.

The National Insurance Crime Bureau suggests they be used in tandem with supporting deterrents, not least of which include immobilizing devices that disable critical automotive functions such as hidden switches that prevent an engine from starting, and fuel cut-off devices that enable a vehicle to run for only a short time before stalling. Since disabled vehicles can still be towed away, the fourth layer of security, and the most sophisticated, is encouraged.

Tracking devices are critical components of fleet management systems. The high-tech features of these tools enable owners and enforcement authorities to track in real time the movement and location of vehicles and assist in the recovery of property, reduce the risk of loss or damage to cargo, and increase the likelihood of apprehending perpetrators. Tracking devices commonly use Global Pos-

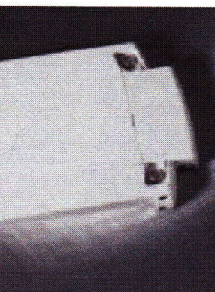


sitioning Systems (GPS) for locating vehicles. The GPS sends vehicle information, such as speed, direction



and location, to a remote user which police can view on an electronic map.

The only North American company equipped with cellular-driven technology that specializes exclusively in the recovery of stolen vehicles and freight is Boomerang Tracking. Unlike GPS systems, the cellular-driven technology camouflages the antenna and tracking device deep within the body of the vehicle and can also identify stolen vehicles and cargo buried in underground lots and in metal shipping containers,



benefits which GPS systems cannot provide. Such precautions can result in reduced insurance pre-

miums as well as a quick retrieval of units due to these tracking devices and in-house retrieval teams that are dispatched immediately when notification of a theft is received.

Elm Technologies’ fleet tracking systems, conversely, does employ a satellite-based tracking system of non-powered assets. Sales Manager, Paul Gallagher, attributes the success of Elm’s products to the inability of tech-savvy thieves to interfere with signal transmission, a risk he says is more prevalent in cellular-based applications. Elm Technologies’ suite of mobile asset management solutions includes SkyBitz tracking products for all types of trailers. The featured models, the GLS400 and GLS410 are used primarily to enhance operational efficiencies by monitoring in real time the movement and location of all units with easy-to-install hardware that is difficult to detect for would-be thieves. A key feature of the SkyBitz mod-

els is trailer optimization. Paul Gallagher explains: “Monitoring and recording the length of time a trailer waits at a docking facility, for example, enables the carrier to demonstrate any unreasonable delays that exceed the limits of a contract and take remedial action.” Included among the multiple benefits of the SkyBitz models - asset optimization, remote monitoring and control, and In-Transit Visibility - are the enhanced safety and security benefits associated with the constant monitoring of the location and status of trailers. The SkyBitz system is equipped with enhanced security functions such as geofence technology and lock-down features.

In an age of well executed thefts, brazen attempts to steal almost any product that’s quickly converted into cash, and limited anti-theft resources, expect to see more criminal activity, and by extension, ongoing innovations to counteract assaults in the transportation industry. ■