

# CRIME STOPPERS

**Contractors adopt multiple strategies  
to control jobsite equipment theft and  
improve recovery rates**

**By Debra Wood**

**THIEVES ANNUALLY STEAL MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF EQUIPMENT, RESULTING IN JOB DELAYS AND FINANCIAL LOSSES FOR CONTRACTORS.**

The National Equipment Register of New York, an Insurance Services Office (ISO) company dedicated to reducing theft and increasing recovery, estimates equipment-theft costs vary from \$300 million to \$1 billion annually, not including business interruption or short-term rental costs. NER adds that as little as 6.5% of the stolen equipment is recovered.

Thieves seem to prefer newer machines. In 2006, 88% of the stolen equipment reported to NER was manufactured after 1999. Skid-steer loaders account for 34% of stolen machinery, backhoe loaders 17% and tractors 13%, according to NER. Most machines were taken from jobsites.

Texas, Florida, California, North Carolina and Georgia accounted for 31% of all thefts. Those five states also had high construction activity, at least in 2007.

"It is too soon to tell if there is or will be an uptick in thefts due to the economic climate," says Ryan Shepherd, NER operations manager. "Theft could be down be-

cause there will likely be fewer machines out on unsecured jobsites."

On the other hand, Shepherd says, fraud could go up, so more machines could be burned or have electrical fires.

From common-sense tactics and low-tech locks to high-tech global-positioning systems and radio-frequency recovery programs, contractors have taken different approaches to prevent theft or recover pieces of equipment after an incident. NER recommends a multifaceted, risk-management strategy to prevent thefts.

Alabama AGC has partnered with BulletProof Electronics of Bradenton, Fla., to develop HeistProof, a digital electronic key-and-lock system that allows only an authorized user to start the machine.

"We are sold on the technology and the ability of this equipment to stop construction theft," says Henry T. Hagood Jr., executive director of Alabama AGC. "If you cannot pick up the equipment and physically move it, you cannot steal it."