

# Vandalism Strikes Two Pieces of Logging Equipment

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*To help TPA members avoid accidents resulting in injury or damage to property, the Timber Bulletin, in association with Lumbermen's Underwriting Alliance, will publish details of actual incidents and what can be done to avoid such occurrences in the future. By sharing this information, TPA and LUA hope to make our industry as safe as possible.*

## Background:

Despite the best efforts of owners and operators to properly maintain and protect their equipment from

the risks of day-to-day operations, vandalism can rear its ugly head at any time, making all of these efforts futile. The following

## Lessons from Losses

information was put together from a personal interview with the owner, review of the involved mobile equipment, and discussion with the responding volunteer fire department.

A mid-sized Minnesota logging company operates a conventional logging operation with supporting trucks and the necessary dozers/equipment for small road-building jobs. The weather had been dry and sunny with low humidity, and with temperatures around 90 degrees. The job site included a mixed timber stand consisting of hardwood, balsam and jack pine, and was located on private land along an existing driveway about 1/8 of a mile off the township road. A private home was also located at the site, farther down this driveway, approximately 100 yards from the logging work site.

Prior to the incident, maintenance and housekeeping had been very good for these two pieces of equipment. The John Deere delimber had a good spring

cleaning approximately 100 hours before the fire and a new engine with less than 300 hours of use. The John Deere skidder also had been recently power washed, the radiator replaced, new battery/cables installed, and an injector pump replacement all within the last nine hours of operation. The involved equipment had sat idle for over 60 hours before the fire occurred.

The operators for these machines were considered fully trained in proper operation and maintenance. The delimber operator had worked for this operation for over a year, bringing over 25 years of work experience to this operation. The skidder operator had been with this operation for over four years also with additional experience.

## Incident:

On a Sunday morning around 8 a.m., the land owner reported the equipment fire to the volunteer fire department, located approximately four miles away. Upon arrival, the two pieces of equipment were found still burning. Both cabs on the machines were completely destroyed, and the skidder tires were just starting to catch fire. The equipment was nearly a total loss, with some salvage value on the

delimber.

The fire in the equipment and surrounding area was extinguished. No injuries occurred. Vandalism was speculated as the cause.

## Unsafe Act and/or Condition:

Considering that this logging equipment had not been operated for over 60 hours and the level of destruction that took place, the cause of loss remains uncertain.

However, a number of factors were considered in the investigation that causes some question as to the cause: 1) there had been no weather situations in the area over the last two days, 2) the operators were quite certain the electrical master switches was shut off, 3) there were five pieces of equipment on this job site and the two pieces that burned were the closest to the roadway, 3) separation of the equipment was sufficient to the uninvolved equipment and the skidder tires may have burned had the fire spread from one machine to the other, 4) the hottest area of fire was in both cabs, and 5) the engine compartments were still burning upon arrival, suggesting this was the latest area of involvement in both pieces. Speculation leads to the conclusion that this was a result



Separation of mobile equipment at log landing.

of vandalism involving fires started within the cabs.

## **VANDALISM PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Restricting vehicle access to job sites during off-hours is one of the best ways to protect equipment. Use a gate, boulders, dirt berm, or a drag of trees to stop traffic.
2. Remove keys, lock doors, and turn off master switches when leaving the job overnight. Additional master switches for electrical and fuel systems could be added for backup.
3. Lock fuel, oil and engine compartments to prevent tampering. Add locks if they did not come installed from the factory.
4. Park equipment away from ignition sources. Stay back from slash piles that could be ignited. Space equipment at least 50 feet apart to reduce chance of fire spreading from one machine to another.
5. When harvest site is adjacent to a traveled road, use terrain or standing trees as a visual screen to prevent shooting at equipment from the road.
6. Don't leave equipment unattended in an unsecured location for long periods of time. Check on the status of equipment during off days when feasible. In high-risk situations, consider having someone stay at the harvest site.
7. Over nights and weekends, service trucks and log trucks should be taken home or to another secure location when possible.
8. Consider using hidden motion-activated cameras to record movement in and out of the job site. Using signage on equipment indicating video surveillance will serve as a discouragement to vandals.
9. Mark equipment with your company name. Engrave saws and tools to identify them. Use crime prevention stickers on equipment to show would-be thieves and vandals that you take the safety of your equipment seriously.
10. Enlist the help of neighbors to watch and notify you and the sheriff of trouble. Use private access to timber sales when possible.
11. Inspect equipment for signs of tampering prior to startup to prevent further damage while running. Look for contaminants around fuel and fluid fill areas.
12. Contact local law enforcement, forestry, etc. to report suspicious activity.

The attached pictures highlight different suggestions in blocking roadway access and mobile equipment separation during shut down.



**Permanent gate and signage used to block access.**



**Dirt berm used to block road access.**



**Drag of wood used to block access on a short-term basis.**