

# Rural Crime Prevention

## Metal Theft



Metal theft has become a widespread problem across the nation. It hits the farm especially hard. The damage and loss of key equipment may mean the difference between a year where the farm turns a profit or where it goes under. The theft of metals from farm equipment and in many cases the electrical equipment the farmer uses may cause the loss of livestock and the destruction of crops that need irrigation.

The costs are high for farmers when replacing damaged or stolen equipment from which copper, brass, bronze, stainless steel, or aluminum components are removed and sold for scrap. If the theft occurs during critical periods of planting and harvesting, loss of productivity can compound the total financial loss.

### What you can do

There are some things you can do to reduce the opportunity for theft. Although several of the suggestions seem pretty drastic and time consuming, they are worth while if a theft is prevented. You are the best judge of what is worth spending your time and trouble on in your particular situation.

A Neighborhood Watch could be set up in your rural community. Neighbors helping neighbors, if the thieves find they are being watched or have a good chance of getting caught – They will go find an easier place in another area to steal metal items.

### Protecting farm equipment

It is sometimes necessary to leave equipment in a field overnight. If it is possible, park machinery and place irrigation piping and equipment out of sight of public roads, behind trees or a hill. The proximity to roads increases the probability of theft or damage. If possible, position equipment and necessary components so it can be seen from the farm house, or alternatively, leave it near a neighbor's house where it can be observed.

- Never leave the keys in the machinery.
- The doors of the machinery should be locked if possible.
- If equipment and irrigation components are not going to be used in the next day or so, return it to a location where you can observe it.
- If your irrigation equipment is in operation, check on it frequently and at **random** times to ensure it still where you put it in operation.
- Use a random schedule to check your equipment, thieves will watch your operations to determine a pattern of your farm operations. On security checks – **be as unpredictable as you can!**

- When there is a breakdown, if possible return the equipment to your main farm yard area. Too often farmers attempt to repair the machinery in the field and leave it unattended while obtaining replacement parts, only to return and find other components missing.
- Always know where your equipment is located on the farm.
- You can chain equipment together or to a tree or other strongly anchored object. Vehicle and equipment steering wheels can be chained so that the vehicle can not be turned in any direction.
- Where possible, large farm machinery not in use should be stored in a secured shed, preferably in sight of the farm house, or parked together in a highly visible area.
- Build a fenced enclosure that you can padlock shut for stationary equipment that cannot be secured sheds. A fenced staging area for irrigation pipes and equipment is a good idea too.
- Building secure structures to protect key farm stationary equipment, such as irrigation pumps and then checking them frequently is a great idea.
- Ensure all pieces of equipment are marked with an identification mark (as shown in the brochure on identification of farm equipment, AGR PUB 555-240). Maintain an inventory with the description, serial number, chassis number, and model numbers of your equipment.
- Photograph and video tape machinery and valuable items of equipment – store them in a safe place with the inventory.
- Secure tools and tool boxes.
- Stolen metals have a ready market. Report all suspicious activity to the police *immediately*.



**If you are reporting a crime in progress, dial 911. Stay on the line and follow the instructions from the 911 operator.**

**For More Information:  
Contact your local Sheriffs Department  
or,  
Washington State Department of Agriculture  
(360) 902 - 1800**



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