

MATERIALS / SECURITY



This solar-powered mobile surveillance is designed specifically for remote or temporary jobsites.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

21st century tech makes thievery scarce
 >> NEIL ZAWICKI

It's bad enough you have to build houses during these mean days. Dealing with thieves and vandals as well is enough to make you sit up at all hours, sipping Maker's Mark and watching mindless infomercials, just to keep your mind off the fact that at any moment a truck full of crooks could be making off with all your floor trusses. A recent DeWalt survey put jobsite security at the top of the list of concerns for contractors. The data further revealed tool theft, material theft and truck/van protection as the top three types of jobsite losses. For more than 60 percent of construction end users and jobsite security system purchasers surveyed, tool theft is the primary concern and has the greatest financial and economic impact. The problems brought from replacement, lost

time and productivity puts a special edge on the crime. Further, more than 50 percent of those surveyed had equipment stolen in the past 12 months. Of those, 75 percent occurred at night and on weekends. Also, 77 percent of jobsites have experienced theft up to five times each year over the past three years. The law enforcement community says professional construction-theft rings are a major concern; they resell tools or tool and machinery parts to unsuspecting contractors.

One of my favorite sights has always been the gang box full of tools hoisted 60 feet in the air with a truss crane. That's a good idea, if you happen to have a crane. But what about your materials? And what about vandals? These days, surveillance capabilities let you all but stay at your jobsite. Even so, you should probably load your tools up and bring them home at the end of each day.

GO LIVE

What could be better than having security cameras trained on your jobsite, ready to record any intrusions? How about a live feed? When the Street of Dreams homes in Woodinville, Wash., were torched in March, one builder had a camera system in place, but he's not sure the system was on at the time. FBI officials have possession of the gear as part of their investigation. That sort of thing could have been avoided. In fact, FBI officials would not have had to take the equipment away, they would have been alerted in real time. That is, if they were using a system by Minnesota-based RSI Video Technologies. That company offers a product called Videofied. It provides live surveillance of your jobsite, and alerts you by cell phone if anything suspicious is happening. Also, it alerts the police so they may dispatch a patrol car to the site. This, say company officials at USA Security, a distributor of the technology, can eliminate false alarms, such as a large dog, a moose or a romantic high school couple wandering onto the site. With this system, if there's a genuine thief or vandal, they're on live TV and the cops are coming.

"Ultimately, it is about priority police response," explains company literature. "Video verified alarms are no longer just a routine alarm but are treated as a crime-in-progress."

It works like this: As an intruder activates the integrated night vision camera, it sends video to a dispatch center or notification list (to your cell phone and/or e-mail). An encrypted radio communications allows for total wireless operation. A control module communicates over an AT&T cell network.

STILL, AS WE ALL KNOW, SOME THIEVES ARE ABOUT AS SHARP AS DRYWALL TAPE. EVEN WITH THIS SYSTEM IN PLACE, THEY STILL TRY.

BIG BROTHER IS HARD TO MISS

While some systems rely upon ambush tactics (which can in fact be very effective), others go for the "big guy with an axe handle standing in the open" approach. Pro-Vigil offers live surveillance through a grandly obvious remote security station, complete with camera globes, strobe lights and sirens, as well as voice recordings that warn intruders. The system and service costs \$1,500 monthly. The unit is so obvious, any thief, being an opportunist by nature, would probably drive on by at the site of it. It's almost as good as setting up an inflatable jumping cage and letting a group of police officers go crazy inside. Still, as we all know, some thieves are about as sharp as drywall tape. Even with this system in place, they still try. Good thing the system's more than just a scarecrow. And the scarecrow element was certainly deliberate. Another company that sells remote security stations designed not just to deter, but capture as well, is CPS Security Solutions. CPS has an Internet Accessible Mobile Surveillance Unit. It features digital cameras, remote monitoring for a command center and interactive wireless technology.

"We offer remote viewing, so clients can check out their site any time anywhere through any type of media, from their PC or from their cell phone," says CPS marketing manager Jeanette Hernandez. "But along with that service, we have a command center always watching the site, so you get double exposure."

SOLAR SECURITY

In response to clients with remote jobsites that don't necessarily have power, CPS also offers solar-powered MSUs.

"We're always listening to our

PHOTO COURTESY OF CPS SECURITY SYSTEMS

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customers," says Hernandez. "So many of them have jobsites out in the middle of nowhere, especially in Phoenix. With these, you don't need a generator and you'll be saving money on power."

CPS plans to roll out a new compact, tripod-mounted MSU for smaller or more temporary jobsites. "It's a much more portable, temporary version," says Hernandez. "It's a megapixel camera that transmits to our command center." Making these systems look scary and no-nonsense can be effective, but apparently not always.

"We're primarily a live monitoring service," says Pro-Vigil CEO Jeremy White. "So we really tried to make this thing look really good." Still, White says some crooks seem to miss the point and do not heed the warnings that they are being watched and recorded in real time.

"It's amazing how many people just walk right past it," he says. White speculates the reason crooks who ignore the warnings do so because they think they'll be long gone before any action is taken. "Most of our competitors offer just a recording system," he says. "It's hard to get people to understand that we're watching



Pro-Vigil's virtual guard station is more than an ominous scarecrow. It's live TV.

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