

Fuel Tank Security

The theft of fuel is one of the most common types of theft on farms. The theft of fuel can vary from a nuisance factor to a substantial financial cost. With the current high price of fuel, thefts from fuel tanks on properties have escalated. Consequently, the financial losses to farmers have increased.

Locking your tanks

The first step in preventing fuel theft is to lock your fuel tank. While a determined thief can use bolt cutters, a good strong steel padlock and chain can prevent a theft. Many people make the mistake of putting a \$2.00 lock on a \$1,000 fuel tank. The key to the padlock should not be removable unless the padlock is closed. Ideally the fuel tank cut-off valve should be locked rather than the nozzle and hose. If there is an electrically controlled pump on the tank, make sure the control switch is located in a locked building or in the house, and that the electricity is turned off when the fuel tank is not in use.

Location of fuel tanks

Fuel theft can be reduced by properly locating storage tanks. Often the primary consideration for the location of fuel tanks is convenience. This is important, but what is convenient for the resident may be equally convenient for the thief. If the tank is located above the ground, an ideal placement would be where the tank is visible from the house,

but concealed from the roadway. Don't locate them behind sheds or silos. The further the tank is from the road, the better. Most thieves will think twice about stealing when they do not have an easy escape route.

Keep the area around the pumps or tanks clear of equipment and other obstructions – don't give thieves cover.

If there is more than one tank, they can be clustered in the same area. This will simplify observation and make it easier to fence or put alarms on the tanks if it becomes necessary.

The best location for a fuel tank is underground. Tanks are less visible and much more difficult to steal from when placed underground. However, it also adds to the installation cost and therefore, may not always be practical.

If there are both diesel and fuel tanks, use a colour coded system to identify the contents, rather than labelling them. Make it as difficult as possible for the thief to identify a target.

On large properties, where tanks are needed to service isolated areas of the property, it is important to ensure they are kept locked and they are located out of sight of a public road. It is a good idea to only fill these tanks over the time they are in use, such as sowing or harvest.

Likewise, mobile tanks used to service farm machinery over busy periods also need to be locked and stored out of sight when not in use. Ideally, these tanks should be returned to the main storage area.

Security

- Close and lock the valves on all on-ground and overhead tanks when not in use.
- Turn off power to pumps.
- Keep track of fuel purchases. Dip your tanks daily and monitor your fuel usage so that you know if there is an unexplained loss of fuel. Install a flow metre to supervise fuel use.
- Keep a book at the tank for each user to record fuel usage for various vehicles and machinery.
- It is a good idea to fence the area around the fuel tanks. Consider locating the tanks close to an outbuilding in which tools and other valuable equipment are stored, and then erecting a security fence around the entire area. Gates should also be locked with good quality padlocks and chains.
- Security lights, if properly installed, can provide excellent low cost security for fuel tanks located within the farmhouse and yard area. To be effective, lights should be placed so that they illuminate the wider area between the house and the tanks. Avoid placing lights so that they shine directly onto the tank. This will cause the tank to be silhouetted and thus stand out to a passerby if your house is located close to the road. Also ensure that the lights do not point directly toward the house. This causes a blinding effect and makes observation of the tanks difficult. A soft light is recommended. A bright light, although an effective illuminator of the area, provides too sharp a contrast to allow one to see into the surrounding area. Lights can be linked to a sensor illuminating only with the presence of

physical movement in the area or reactive to light: coming on and staying on throughout the night.

What to do if you are experiencing theft

- Notify the Police. Many farmers fail to report fuel theft because it is difficult to tell exactly how much fuel has been stolen. However the police would prefer to know about these crimes in case there is a pattern of thefts in your district. The more information they have, the better equipped they are.
- Notify your fuel agent. Ask your agent to notify you exactly when and where he refills your tanks on farm.
- If the problem persists, ask local police about setting a trap for the thieves by adding an agent to the fuel, which can corrupt an engine. These alternatives need to be conducted with police supervision and in liaison with local garages.

Acknowledgment:

These crime prevention strategies have been developed from the ideas and tried and true initiatives given to us by farmers across New South Wales. We sincerely thank them for their valued contribution. Additional material has been drawn from the South Australian Neighbourhood Watch Association.

URL: <http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/>

For more information, or if you wish to comment on the material in this leaflet, or if you have any other suggestions for crime prevention strategies on farm, please contact Elaine Barclay at:

THE INSTITUTE FOR RURAL FUTURES

University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351

Telephone: Freecall 1800 652 592
Facsimile: (02) 6773 3245
Email: ebarclay@metz.une.edu.au



This Crime Prevention Program has been sponsored by



Crime Prevention Division