

# EIGHT WAYS OWNER-OPERATORS CAN PROTECT CARGO FROM THIEVES

Thieves are becoming more sophisticated at targeting high-value cargo as it moves along the nation's highways. Thanks to the Internet, criminals can easily track high-value goods by monitoring load boards and social media.

A single cargo-theft incident could spell disaster for your business. The average loss per cargo-theft incident was nearly \$190,000 in 2015, according to CargoNet, a firm that collects and analyzes cargo-crime data.

Your cargo-insurance policy might not cover the full value of the cargo you haul, leaving you liable for the rest, and it could be riddled with exemptions that would prevent coverage altogether. According to research by Overdrive magazine, half of owner-operators don't know their coverage limit, and 60 percent don't have enough reserve funds to pay for emergency losses their insurance company won't cover.

Knowledge and prevention are the best tools for protecting your business from cargo theft. When you track the trends and play a good defense, most thieves will pass up your truck in search of an easier target. Here are eight tips to keep you a step ahead of the thieves:



## USE ALL THE CARGO-SECURITY MEASURES AT YOUR DISPOSAL

The expanding array of high-tech products is providing an arsenal for fighting back, but low-tech methods are still effective and shouldn't be discarded. Employ tractor and trailer locking devices and security seals and, if your budget allows, consider: GPS tracking, geofencing, systems that send alerts when trailer doors are opened, devices that detect whether a trailer is loaded and vehicle-immobilization technology.

## DON'T SPILL THE BEANS

Resist the urge to discuss—out loud or online—what you're hauling and where you're delivering. Be tight-lipped on the CB and with social media as well. If you're targeted, thieves will check your accounts, hoping to learn about upcoming stops.

## AVOID STOPPING IN THE FIRST 250 MILES

Fill your fuel tank before you pick up loads and stay on the road as long as you can afterward. Thieves who watch as expensive cargo is loaded onto a truck will follow it a significant distance, waiting for the driver to leave the load unattended. Be mindful of vehicles with multiple occupants and out-of-state plates following you.

## GUARD THE GOODS

Park in well-lit, heavily travelled areas with security cameras and, when possible, use buildings, posts, fences or other objects to make it difficult for thieves to open your trailer's doors. Check the trailer frequently. Don't leave loads on roadsides, and never store keys inside the tractor or in other places a thief is likely to look.

## KNOW THE TRENDS AND TREAT HIGH-RISK LOADS WITH EXTRA CAUTION

Stay informed about cargo-theft trends, including which goods are most popular, by checking out quarterly reports from CargoNet and FreightWatch International. Recently, food, beverages and electronics have topped the list. When hauling expensive or commonly stolen cargo, stop only at secure locations and have someone ride with you, if possible, so the load can be attended at all times.

## UNDERSTAND THE BOUNDARIES OF YOUR CARGO INSURANCE

Know the value of the most expensive loads you haul and make sure your policy adequately covers you. Pay attention to exclusions and negotiate or shop around if anything concerns you. (Cargo policies differ significantly among insurers.) Some policies won't cover you if the load was unattended. Others might exclude thefts of commonly targeted goods or heists that occur in high-theft-rate areas.

## BE EXTRA VIGILANT AS HOLIDAYS APPROACH

Aim for as little downtime as possible, and don't let a loaded trailer sit over holidays. Double check that receivers' holiday hours line up with your scheduled delivery times.

## REPORT THEFTS IMMEDIATELY

If a cargo theft is reported within two hours, the odds of recovery are better than 50-50. But after four hours, the recovery rate drops to 25 percent. Be prepared to quickly turn over license plate numbers, VINs, descriptions of your tractor/trailer and data from any electronic tracking devices.