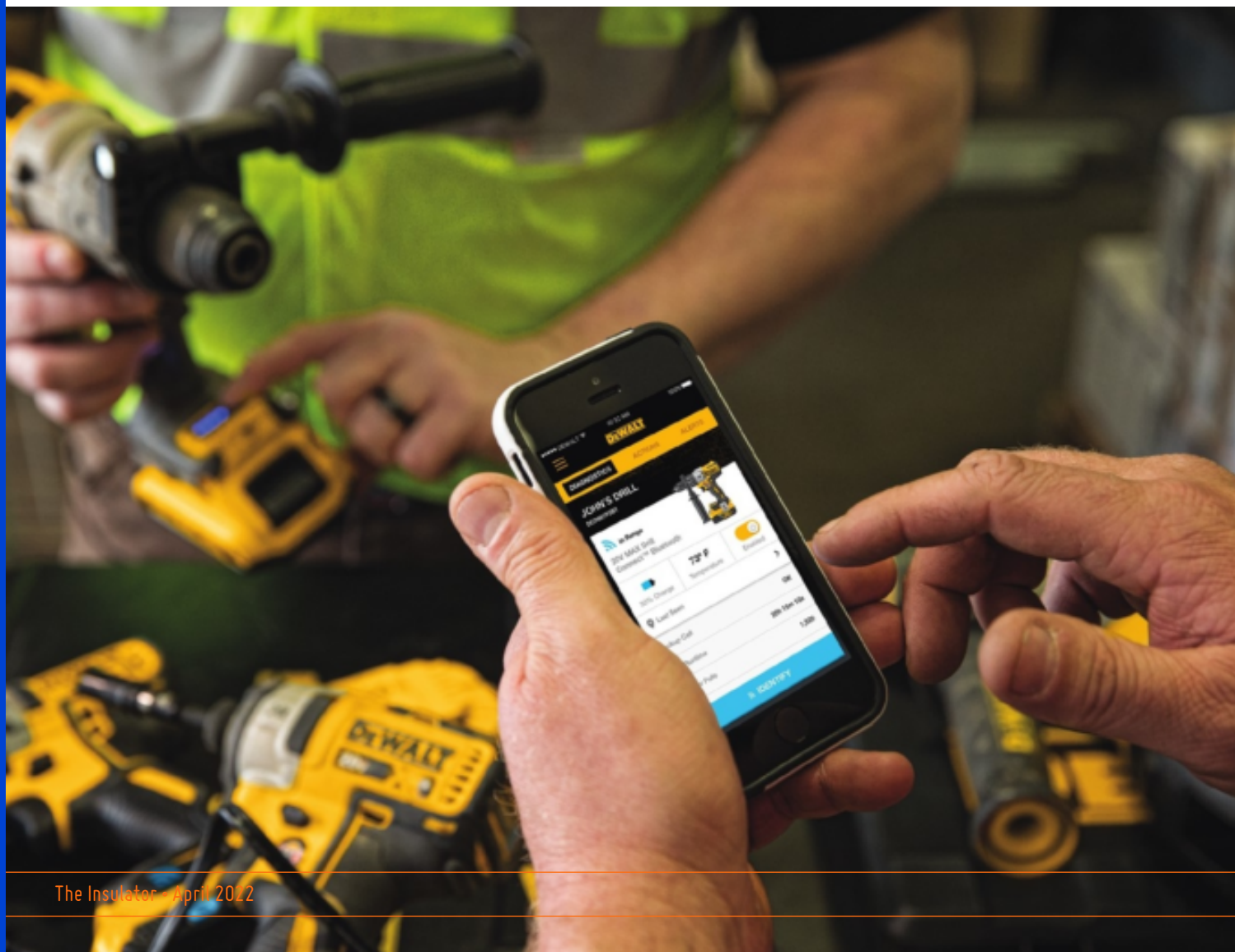


Preventing Jobsite Tool Theft

I once had a circular saw stolen while on a job site. An acquaintance of the painting contractor walked through, grabbed it out of an unlocked toolbox and disappeared into the afternoon. A couple of days later, a friend saw it in the local pawnshop (it was a small town), but by the time I got there after work, the tool had been sold or removed by the owner, and he played dumb about ever having it. Even though I replaced the saw, I still miss it and am kind of ticked off to this day about its theft.

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That's the nature of tool theft. It's costly. Some experts rate the annual cost of job-site theft, which includes materials other than tools, at about \$400 million. Tool theft eats away at a company's profit margin, and it strikes right at the core of a trade worker. Using these tools is how skilled workers demonstrate their value and talent. Losing one hurts.

Security experts identify lots of techniques workers should use to protect tools from theft or loss. They include:

1. Paint or engrave your tools
2. Keep them in a lock box
3. Install job-site security cameras
4. Remove the batteries or chargers
5. Take them home
6. Install fences to limit access to the site.

All of those things are good, but there are three things in particular, that can significantly cut down on tool theft and take advantage of modern technologies.

1. Create a tool management process
2. Keep an inventory
3. Make individuals responsible

Michael Stoller is director of product management for Stanley Black & Decker, New Britain, Conn., and he says, "We've looked at tool loss a lot of different ways. One of the conclusions is tool loss is less about theft and more about good processes that prevent things from walking away. When we encounter some companies, they have no visibility between the tool crib and the job site. The warehouse manager will assign 200 tools and assets to sites. Things will break. Nobody will check them in at the end of the week. That lack of process leads to lack of visibility."

At Robert Bosch Tool Corp., Prospect, Ill., Tammy Bauer, Pro User marketing manager, agrees. "When tools are not managed or tracked effectively, it can lead to a higher likelihood of assets walking off the job site. Tools can be lost, misplaced or stolen in transit. One of the most common things we hear from our customers is that workers will leave the job site early to head home for the day, realize they left their tools at the job site, but decide not to turn around and drive back because they're already close to home."

"One of the most common mistakes," says Dean Gagliano, associate product manager, One- Key tool tracking services for Milwaukee Tool, Brookfield, Wis., "although I wouldn't call it a mistake, is workers being careless with their items. At the end of the day, they're doing things in a rush and they forget to lock up a tool. It's more an opportunity situation when tools become stolen. Tools getting misplaced or lost is a completely different thing. They're not taking proper precautions, not taking it back to the toolbox. They're giving the opportunity to thieves."

Create a Process

The surest way to protect the investment of your tools is to create a tracking process and assign responsibility. The responsibility includes everyone from management, who has to set up the process, to the warehouse managers and site supervisors to the tradesperson using the tool. Lost or stolen tools are the responsibility of all.

There are simple ways to do this. Keep an inventory of all your tools that is managed by the warehouse manager. That person checks out tools to the job site, where the site supervisor then has responsibility. He or she can then assign tools to specific trade people.

No matter if you're using technology or not, you have to have a process for tracking your tools and keeping them inventoried. Anything that goes to the job site needs to be tracked and on the job site, craftspeople need to be assigned responsibility for any tool they use. No matter how you work that, whether you use

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spreadsheets or everything is hand-written, there is often little interest among construction crews to spend their time doing paperwork.

"I bet that on 50% of job sites that is how inventory is taken," says Stoller. "The foreman grabs somebody who writes down a bunch of inventory numbers that have been email, then goes around to check off all the tools. The process is painstaking. The person in the field has to find everything then transpose it back."

Giving responsibility to a craftsperson for a tool often implies ownership. "You have a drill on your site assigned to Joe who takes it to another site," says Gagliano. "but you didn't track that move. More often than not on a site with a lot of tradespeople, they're just trying to find the nearest tool to get the task done. They think it's their tool. A lot of crew members take tools home to do side jobs. They don't mean to be malicious about it, but somewhere in the process that tool may get stolen and doesn't get back."

There are technologies out there that can improve that system. Using labels with barcodes and QR codes you can scan into an online database can make the process much simpler. Tied to smartphone apps, that method digitizes an onerous process. Those programs work well in the manufacturing world where tools tend to stay in the same place, but in the construction arena tools move from site to

site and often can get buried in the bottom of a truck's toolbox, making them far more mobile than intended.

Tool Manufacturer Technology

Tool manufacturers such as Bosch, Milwaukee and Dewalt (a division of Stanley Black & Decker) are leaning into technology to help prevent tool theft and loss. By giving management and workers the ability to monitor and track tools more simply and effectively, they are reducing the burden of inventory

management and creating new capabilities that can help recover lost tools.

For the most part, the new technologies rely on a combination of Bluetooth technology and software apps. Milwaukee Tool has a program called One-Key that pairs Bluetooth-enabled tools with a software app. The tools may be a Milwaukee Tool but the company also provides small asset ID tags called TICKs that can attach to any tool such as a ladder. Tools are tracked and managed through the app. "You use the app to scan the asset id tag," says Gagliano. "Every time you do that, it will give you a location update with the time signature and date code. It's really good for scanning in and scanning out."

Using Bluetooth technology and apps to scan, which Dewalt and Bosch also have, means that inventory moves much more quickly. "Doing inventory manually can take two to three minutes per tool," says Stoller. "Just digitizing, even without Bluetooth and bar codes, can drive that down 50%. With Bluetooth and bar codes, you can drive that time down even further. And you start to create easy accountability."

These technologies create seamless management processes between the tool crib, the job site, and the trade person. No longer do workers roam the site looking for the impact drill, interrupting everyone in their work to ask if they've seen it. Tracking tools

this way means the tool is always visible.

Bosch's system is called Bluehound, and Bauer says, "In the tools tab of the Bluehound application, users can access a tool's last known location and see who each tool was assigned to, establishing a helpful starting point. The system is also able to pinpoint tagged assets within 100 feet of their geographic location."

Some of the apps, such as One-Key, even allow for geo-fencing, which allows users to set up a perimeter and get notified when the tool wanders beyond that point. For dog owners, these kinds of tags are very familiar. A small Bluetooth-enabled tag affixed to a collar lets the owner know when Fido has roamed beyond the property. The same can be used for tools, helping to prevent that unfortunate event when a lead carpenter has landed a side job building a deck and decides the company laser level is the perfect tool to do the layout.

Given the new technologies, tool management is now so easy that loss of productivity and from theft or loss no longer need to be major issues on job sites. Workers can feel comfortable knowing the tool they need is easily available, and management can take solace in the knowledge that the tools they've spent so much capital on are staying on-site and being used.

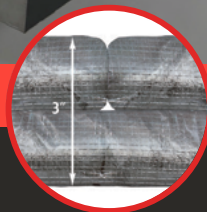
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