

# Physical Security: Your Assets and Your Self

*By Tom Kazez, Woodland Security, Inc.*

Every landowner is aware that vandals and other criminals will trespass on your property. Their crimes range from nuisance to tragic. In all cases, we are better served to avoid the trouble.

I won't create any new theories with this narrative. Sorry, but it comes down to the same old story: plan ahead, do the work and remain alert.

You are aware of a world of technology that can mitigate risk and intervene with this kind of problem. A landowner can spend as much money and time as they want. At times, these kinds of investments are justified. I will come back to that idea, but prefer to start with basic solutions. First, though, and strictly for the newer landowners, let me describe the range of circumstances you might encounter.

If you own 10 acres and live on the property, your challenges might be limited. If you own 1,000 acres in Georgia but live in California, your challenges will be more dramatic. Your property might never experience trespass, encroachment, dumping and vandalism; many forest properties are blessed with isolation and good neighbors. But when the city lights creep out where farm and forest had been, your new neighbors might not share your values. So, as you read this, your own assessment of your circumstances should guide your response.

Where a problem does exist, or might occur, the landowner will want to intervene. As we know from most of our experience, a pro-active approach can really mitigate damage and expense. As I indicated in the second paragraph, this is not new material and it's not rocket science. And I will begin with the basic solutions that I prefer. Specifically:



**Deterrent:** Some criminals can be dissuaded when visible preventative measures exist. Here are a list of common, practical and inexpensive practices landowners should strongly consider:

1. **Mark your property lines.** Your exterior property lines should be marked and remarked regularly (every 3-5 years would be a good guideline). Placards along highways should discourage trespassers and trash dumpers.
2. **Visit your property regularly.** This responsibility can be delegated to a contract forester, a neighbor or relative. Someone you trust should visit your property at least 3-4 times a year. Unless your property is extensive enough to fly over with aircraft, this means walking some boundary lines, too. All signs of trespass and encroachment must be identified and resolved. Your problems with criminals will only get larger, if history is any indicator.
3. **Know your neighbors.** Joining landowners have the same concerns you do; they are likely to share many of the same values. A good neighbor will call you promptly if trouble begins to develop. By

'neighbors,' I actually refer to a pretty large group: game wardens, deputies, hunting clubs and anyone doing work on your behalf. I recommend that you remain on good, speaking terms with all kinds of good neighbors.

4. **Lights and locks.** Most of the time, you won't be fencing your forest lands. But you can limit access by motor vehicles. In the age of the accursed ATV, gates have become more elaborate. ATV trespassers are creative in finding ways around gates. **Please Note:** all gates, and especially new gates, must not represent unusual liability. Cable gates are notoriously dangerous. You would never wish that kind of injury on anyone. Cattle gates are cheap to purchase and cheap to install. Of course, all gates can be vandalized. Our goal is to deter as many as we can, with little expense.

If you have buildings, sheds or any kind of structure that vandals might target, please consider inexpensive lights that are motion activated. Your local hardware store has a selection of outdoor lights that are both motion activated and solar powered. Vandals and roaches hate the light. And a little light will go a long way toward making hidden cameras more effective.



**Personal Safety:** Unless you are currently an active police officer with all the training, experience, equipment and responsibility that goes with the job, please note my feeble advice (again, nothing new here). If you are inclined to confront a criminal in the act of his/her crimes, **don't do it.**

If trespassers are acting oddly on your property and tearing up your shed, leave the property immediately and call the police. I do not recommend that you block the exit of trespassers. If they want to run away, let them.

If you are forced to defend yourself or your family, then we all would do whatever is necessary. But I am confident that ***property is not worth a violent confrontation.*** Even if you happen to 'win' a fight, the results can still be tragic.

**Technology:** As you know, our world today is an amazing place. For a little money, you can monitor your home (or remote property) via cameras linked to the internet. There are a wide range of devices that will send images through a cell phone link, once motion is detected by the device.

Game cameras are often used in security applications. They can work well. Please Note: they are hard to hide. Bambi won't notice a device strapped to a tree, but Bubba might. And Bubba can't leave it alone. But a search of the internet can provide you with other options.

If you do try to use a game camera for asset security, make certain you acquire a unit with no flash and with no visible light after dark. Some infrared emitters are visible and some are not. Bubba will investigate all little red lights out in the woods at night; guaranteed.

**Summary:** Where you have concerns about your land, timber and other assets, I recommend the low-tech, low-cost basic solutions first. If the cost of the problem escalates, there are other options to consider. Best of luck to you, and please keep yourself and your family safe at all times.