

VIGILANCE IS KEY

Simple steps to strengthen farm and plant security



The Animal Agriculture Alliance works to provide farm security and crisis management recommendations to our members and the animal agriculture industry. For more insights and security resources, visit www.animalagalliance.org.

A safe and abundant food supply is essential to a nation's security, and America's livestock and poultry farmers and ranchers work each day to provide milk, meat, poultry and eggs to our growing and hungry country – and the world.

Unfortunately, there are some groups and individuals who would endanger lives and destroy property, claiming to protect animals or the environment. In the past, farmers, food processors, feed companies, input suppliers and others have been attacked using firebombs, nail bombs, vandalism and graffiti. Our computer systems and Internet security have been breached. Some in our industry have been attacked because they believe in the progress of biotechnology. Threats against those who speak out on behalf of our industries and our progress are all too common.

To help protect farms and food processing facilities, the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act was passed in 2006. The AETA created a federal law prohibiting individuals from participating in activities “for the purpose of damaging or interfering with the operations of an animal enterprise.” The law covers conduct that “damages or causes the loss of any real or personal property” or “places a person in reasonable fear” of injury or harm.

While the AETA helped establish some protection for farms and the animal protein production industry, there are still individuals today attempting to gain access to farms with intentions of either harming the facility (with vandalism, by releasing animals or through other tactics), or by damaging its reputation and the reputation of our entire industry. Increasingly, animal rights extremists target farms and processing plants with “undercover” videos – often edited to depict a certain environment and distributed to the media or on YouTube. While we know that these videos are the extreme exceptions to the high standards of animal care found in most facilities, the alarming images cause a lot of concern among consumers with little exposure to the industry.

We can and must do more to protect our farms, ranches, mills and manufacturing facilities. We must be more vigilant, more wary, more resolved to not let extremist organizations interfere with our efforts to feed this country and the world as best we can.

All operations should maintain the priority of keeping their employees safe—nothing is more important. All operations should reevaluate their physical safety and security. All operators should talk to local law enforcement and emergency services to get their best advice. All operators should sit down with their employees to make sure they understand the company's priority on employee safety and facility biosecurity. Large commercial operations should invest in a professional plan to maintain or enhance the security of their facilities and the safety of their employees. Smaller operations can also do good, sound planning and relationship building within their communities.

The Animal Agriculture Alliance recommends the following very basic steps to help maintain security at your facility. These recommendations are not a guarantee of safety, nor are they comprehensive to all farm, ranch or company operations, but they can give a good start to developing an overall security plan to help ensure the safety of your family, your employees and your animals. When in doubt, consult an attorney familiar with your unique situation and local laws.



Basic steps to a secure facility

- Talk seriously with your local police/fire/emergency departments now. Get to know the people whose job it is to protect you, your loved ones and your property. Let them know you're prioritizing your facility's security and be sure to report any eco or animal rights criminal activity. It is imperative you know whom to call if necessary. Know response times. Know how many officers are on duty during early morning hours, prime time for 'hits' on rural facilities. Make sure they have copies of maps of your facilities indicating service shut-off locations, security areas, and any area of sensitivity or vulnerability.
- Evaluate every request for information about your operation, even the most routine. Don't fall prey to false praise - never agree to a suspicious request until you have verified the validity of the request. Whenever possible, require requests for sensitive information/tours be in writing. Never provide information over the phone (it can be misinterpreted or misconstrued). Always reply in writing. Obtain as much information as possible, e.g. name, phone number, address, reason for request, what will the person be doing with the information, who else may have been contacted, etc. Ask if you may receive a copy of the final report once it is completed. If the person hesitates to cooperate with any of these requests, refuse them access to your operation or information about your operation. Ask for references. Make a call to verify the person requesting any sensitive information is who he/she says he/she is, especially those claiming to be reporters.
- Ensure access to the facility is controlled. Establish check-in procedures for visitors. Place appropriate signs noting such procedures and require visitors to sign in and out upon entering and leaving facility. Use visitor identification badges - even the stick-on kind is better than no visitor identification. This protects your visitor as well as your operation.
- Escort visitors (especially reporters and photographers/videographers) at all times through facility. Employees should be instructed to report all unescorted visitors to the appropriate management and security personnel immediately.
- Maintain basic security: Lock office doors and file cabinets. Have firewalls installed on your computer systems. Maintain separate business and personal computers. Keep all animal health products under lock and key. Use security lighting/alarms. Maintain fencing and gates. Post signs indicating restricted areas and no trespassing, etc.
- Thoroughly screen all job applicants. Take the time to check all references. If you have any questions, ask for further references. Double-check anyone who shows a university or college ID. Any hesitation to provide additional references or documentation by the prospective employee should be a red flag and likely take them off your hire list.
- Watch for unusual behavior by new employees or workers who have no reason to be in the facility past their regular shift. Use seasoned employees to be your "eyes and ears" for anything unusual and have them report suspicious behavior to you.
- Tell all workers at hiring that unannounced locker checks, etc. are part of your routine security maintenance operation and that you will report and/or prosecute any employee who breaks the law.
- Inform employees in vulnerable areas that surveillance or infiltration is a possibility. Any suspicious activity should be reported to supervisors or the appropriate security person immediately.
- Report all suspicious and/or illegal incidents to local police.



- Watch for warning sign that you may be a target. General patterns include an increase in requests for animal specific information or on-farm tours; calls/letters questioning or criticizing your business or particular practices; harassing calls/letters - perhaps not to your operation but one near you; increase in media attention to issues relating to your specific industry; special interest group campaigns locally; and unusual interest in gaining employment, especially in roles involving animal handling.
- Develop a Company Statement and policies relative to care, treatment, nutrition, etc. for your animals. The Alliance can help you with this, as well as with how to talk with the public and the media about your operation's best practices. Have all employees review and sign that they understand these policies and post them in public areas.
- Train all employees that will interact with animals on proper animal care or handling procedures, including what to do if animals are sick or just uncooperative.
- Make it known you practice zero tolerance regarding animal mistreatment and that you will prosecute to the full extent of the law, if necessary.
- In all cases, designate a single spokesperson to handle all calls, including media, about animal care, animal rights or any company policy relative to animals. Also, conduct tests of your security system and if necessary, mock drills on your response program, including media statements, etc.
- Develop a crisis communication/action plan. Establish policies and procedures for handling disruptive, illegal situations as well as for handling adverse publicity that might result from the misuse of information. Your priority is to keep you and your employees safe. Take care of people, then move on to ways to protect bricks and mortar.
- Ensure all employees are familiar with your policies regarding animal care, environmental stewardship, employee care and overall social responsibility. Remember, they have lives away from your business (school, church, soccer fields, etc.) and will likely be asked questions by individuals in your business community.

Recommendations for handling mail

The following are recommendations from the U.S. Postmaster General regarding the safe evaluation and handling of mail:

What Should Make Mail Suspect?

- Mail that is unexpected or received from someone you know don't know
- Mail addressed to someone no longer at your address
- Mail that is handwritten and has no return address or bears a return address that you can't confirm to be legitimate
- Mail that is lopsided or lumpy in appearance (In previous messages, we've also warned you about mail that may have oil spots or other unusual markings or stains)
- Mail that is sealed with excessive amounts of glue or tape
- Mail that is marked with restrictive endorsements such as 'personal' or 'confidential'
- Mail that carries excessive postage

What Should You Do With Suspicious Mail?

- Do not handle a letter or package that you suspect is contaminated or strange
- Don't shake, bump or sniff the suspect letter or package



- Put the mail piece in a plastic bag
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water
- Notify local law enforcement authorities immediately.

Again, vigilance is key in preventing the national security crisis we all face today from becoming even more traumatic. According to Mark Urlaub, director of the USDA's biosecurity program, "Lack of human casualties has been a matter of luck." (The Washington Times, May 8, 2001).

