

# Boxing clever



The term 'thinking out of the box' has been used to refer to the need to think strategically in order to address business problems. However, in the case of plant hire company owner Tim Hall, his creative 'out of the box' solution to trying to combat the major industry problem of plant theft has actually focussed on putting kit in the box!

Tim Hall founded Hall Plant Hire Ltd in Chesterfield some 15 years ago and, like so many of his peers, he has experienced the problem of plant theft and vandalism at first hand. After attending a seminar about the problem, he decided to do something about it and this resulted in the production of the original PlantSafe Midi 2.44m wide secure steel bodied container in mid 2004.

The PlantSafe concept is that plant can be delivered to a customer in a secure 'box' as a complete package. The specially-built steel strongbox container is then used by the customer on site to safely lock away the equipment at the end of each working day.

Good acceptance of the PlantSafe concept led Hall Plant Hire to add 60 Midi units to its hire fleet and then to develop a bigger unit. Called the Maxi, this has become the standard PlantSafe container. It weighs 8.0 tonnes unladen and has a length of 7.5m, a width of 3.01m and a height of 3.01m.

The patented PlantSafe Maxi can typically accommodate a 6 tonne mini excavator and a 6.0 tonne payload dumper or a single machine such as a standard backhoe loader (such as a JCB 3CX) or a 13.0m lift height telescopic handler.

## Remote locking

The original Midi and the subsequent Maxi is both sturdily built steel hook lift containers. They feature a hydraulic cylinder to open and close the end door and there are spring loaded ramps to aid the movement of machines in and out of the PlantSafe.

A lockable hinged reinforced plate is used to cover the hook lift bail bar on the front of the opening door. According to Tim Hall, the PlantSafe has sophisticated external locks that are difficult to access with cutting tools. He is also proud of the electrically operated internal locks that have no external exposure. These



Tim Hall shows off the heavily reinforced steel plate used to hide the hook lift bail bar on the PlantSafe Maxi.

internal locks can only be opened by someone with the appropriate remote control keyfob.

The height of the PlantSafe containers means that they cannot be moved on a standard hooklift truck. So Hall Plant Hire has commissioned a number of low height tri-axle trailers with a capacity of 27 tonnes. Produced by Armstrong & Holmes Ltd of Lincoln, these trailers allow the PlantSafes to be moved with an overall height below the 4.9m legal limit.

To pull its special hook lift trailers, Hall Plant Hire has a Mercedes Actros 6x4 tractor unit, a Mercedes-Benz Unimog U500 and two JCB 3220 Fastracs. The Unimog and the Fastracs enable the PlantSafes to be delivered right onto site irrespective of the ground conditions.

## Growing fleet

Hall Plant Hire now has a total of more than 200 PlantSafes in its hire fleet and it is busy having more built to satisfy demand. Plant Manager Wayne Briddon says, "once customers try our PlantSafe package, they don't need much convincing to order it again for future hires – particularly where the machines

are destined to be used in vulnerable locations. More customers now realise that they can lose out considerably if they suffer plant theft as insurance excess payments can now be as high as £15,000."

Tim Hall says that no plant has yet been stolen from inside a PlantSafe container despite some determined attempts. As a result Hall Plant Hire will now insure (subject to a £2,500 excess) its own



The spacious PlantSafe Maxi can accommodate sizeable items of plant without the need to remove cabs or ROPS frames.

plant hired to customers provided the machines are housed within its PlantSafe when they are not being used.

Customers which have hired the PlantSafe containers from Hall Plant Hire include Ashfield District Council, Cemex UK Construction, Halfway Surfacing Ltd, J Murphy Ltd, Land and Water Group, Leeds County Council, McAndrew Utilities, Morgan Est Utilities, Nottingham County Council, Ringway Group Ltd, Sheffield City Council and Whitehouse Construction. To accommodate the special requirements of Balfour Beatty Utilities (to securely house both a tractor and pipe bursting equipment) Hall Plant Hire has developed the Maxi Plus container. This utilises a bolt-on (separately transported) 3.01m long extension.

## Regional network

Whilst the general plant hired from Hall Plant Hire is generally supplied in South Yorkshire and the Midlands, demand for the hire of the PlantSafe containers (which typically command a weekly hire rate of around £60) is now coming from much further afield. So Tim Hall is considering setting up a network of independent plant hire companies around the country in order to offer customers local supply.

The latest development from Hall Plant Hire is a new ToolVault which is 5.5m long by 2.15m wide and 2.5m high. This steel unit features special 150mm thick double skinned walls, floor and roof filled with a solid setting concrete resin compound. This heavy duty construction results in an unladen weight of 20.0 tonnes – which will deter unauthorised movement.

The ToolVault can be delivered on a standard four axle hook lift truck or on one of Hall Plant Hire's special hook lift trailers. One placed on site, the hook lift bail assembly is removed and its fixing holes covered so that the unit is left with four flat sides with no lifting points.

Hall Plant Hire produced its first ToolVault at the end of last year and



*The new ToolVault with its removable hooklift bail bar shown on the ground beside it.*

it already has 15 units out on hire (at a weekly rate of around £95). Unlike the bigger PlantSafes, this unit is also being offered for sale.

Tim Hall reports that the ToolVault is finding favour on construction sites where it is used to house items such as saws, rammers, surveying equipment etc. Supermarkets are also using the units to house high value goods which cannot be stored in the main building.

The development of both the PlantSafe and the ToolVault is a good example of how a plant hire company has been proactive in the fight against plant theft. In particular the possible availability of a regional PlantSafe 'franchise' in different parts of the UK could provide other hire companies with the means to gain another revenue stream whilst helping their customers to thwart the thieves. ■

☎ 01246 567233 Wayne Briddon, Hall Plant Hire Ltd