The Fight Against Cargo Theft: Insights from the Trucking Industry

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ATRI American Transportation Research Institute

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

ACRONYM LIST

3PL	**Third-Party Logistics Provider**
ATRI	**American Transportation Research Institute**
BOL	**Bill of Lading**
CCTV	**Closed-Circuit Television**
COI	**Certificates of Insurance**
CORCA	**Combating Organized Retail Crime Act**
DHS	**Department of Homeland Security**
FBI	**Federal Bureau of Investigation**
FMCSA	**Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration**
FSR	**Facility Security Requirements**
GPS	**Global Positioning System**
HSI	**Homeland Security Investigations**
HVTT	**High-Value Thief-Targeted**
LSP	**Logistics Service Provider**
LTL	**Less-than-Truckload**
MC	**Motor Carrier**
MFA	**Multi-Factor Authentication**
OSOW	**Over-Sized Over-Weight**
OTR	**Over-the-Road**
RAC	**Research Advisory Committee**
TAPA	**Transported Asset Protection Association**
TIA	**Transportation Intermediaries Association**
TSR	**Truck Security Requirements**
VMT	**Vehicle Miles Traveled**
USDOT	**United States Department of Transportation**

INTRODUCTION

Cargo theft is not a new challenge for the trucking industry; in one form or another it has existed since the industry began in the early 1900s. Supply chains have adapted over the years to respond to different cargo theft targets and theft strategies, but cargo theft has not gone away. In the U.S., cargo thieves are having a digital renaissance – in addition to traditional trailer pilferage and outright theft of trucks, sophisticated information-driven cargo theft crimes have emerged. These thefts are often orchestrated from thousands of miles away, are far less brazen than traditional thefts and can sometimes take weeks to detect.

The new digital platform for cargo theft is possible, in part, because of rapidly expanding visibility into supply chains and reliance on information systems. Freight capacity can be sourced and contracted from anywhere in the world through an internet connection. While supply chain visibility and automation have dramatically improved over the last two decades, that same digital environment has given cargo thieves unfettered access to cargo and customer data. The result has been an influx of schemes where freight is stolen through non-traditional means.

It is clear that cargo theft is a complex and moving target. Even understanding the scale of the issue is difficult. A commonly used loss metric is that cargo theft costs supply chains as much as $35 billion annually; a figure that primarily comes from the National Insurance Crime Bureau.[1] Cargo theft losses among the freight modes are far less than that; the Association of American Railroads estimates that freight rail cargo theft losses in 2024 were slightly more than $100 million, which provides more context to the scale of freight cargo losses.[2]

In 2024, recognizing the growing impact of cargo theft, the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) Research Advisory Committee (RAC) tasked the organization with documenting the challenges of cargo theft to the trucking industry, and outlining steps that could be taken to mitigate the problem.[3] This report offers a greater understanding of cargo theft as it pertains to both for-hire trucking and logistics service providers. The research first provides an overview of the existing cargo theft problem and includes discussions of current cargo theft trends and countermeasures. Next, it collects and analyzes cargo theft data from multiple sources and stakeholders, including motor carriers, logistics service providers and commercial insurance industry representatives. The research also highlights three case studies that describe real-life cargo theft situations and how the stakeholders interdicted. Finally, cargo theft challenges and action items are described and summarized.

[1] National Insurance Crime Bureau, “Cargo Theft” (accessed on October 6, 2025), https://www.nicb.org/prevent-fraud-theft/cargo-theft.
[2] Association of American Railroads, “Federal Regulators Need to Help Combat Freight Rail Cargo Theft” (accessed on October 6, 2025), https://www.aar.org/issue/cargo-theft/.
[3] ATRI’s Research Advisory Committee is comprised of industry stakeholders representing motor carriers, trucking industry suppliers, labor and driver groups, law enforcement, federal government, and academics. The RAC is charged with annually recommending a research agenda for the Institute; ATRI, “ATRI Releases New Research Priorities for 2024” (May 28, 2024), https://truckingresearch.org/2024/05/atri-releases-new-research-priorities-for-2024/.

BACKGROUND

The initial step in the research was an environmental scan of the cargo theft problem in the U.S. Historical reports and articles were synthesized, and the research team then held extensive interviews with industry stakeholders, including motor carriers who have experienced cargo theft and experts who help the industry monitor and prevent cargo theft. Among other outcomes, these interviews informed the development of primary data collection tools. It should be noted that feedback and materials from two entities, CargoNet and the Transported Asset Protection Association (TAPA), were particularly insightful in this task.[4]

During the initial research, five key themes emerged that encompassed the majority of cargo theft issues and countermeasures (Table 1).

Table 1: Five Key Research Themes

Theme	Research Questions
How and Where Cargo Theft Occurs	*What techniques are used? What locations are vulnerable? What goods are targeted?*
The Financial Costs of Cargo Theft	*How much does cargo theft cost the trucking industry?*
Cargo Theft Prevention Strategies	*How does the trucking industry protect cargo?*
Strengthening Partnerships with Law Enforcement	*How can trucking and law enforcement strengthen their partnership to combat cargo theft?*
The Role of Insurance in Shaping Cargo Theft Risk Management	*What role can the insurance industry play in mitigating cargo theft?*

The following ATRI cargo theft research and analysis is built around these five overarching themes.

[4] CargoNet, whose parent company is Verisk, is a private-sector national information-sharing system entity that tracks cargo theft. It serves as a centralized platform for collecting, aggregating and analyzing data from motor carriers, brokers, law enforcement, and other industry stakeholders, …to enhance cargo security across supply chains. Source: CargoNet, "About" (Accessed on August 12, 2025), https://www.cargonet.com/about/;
TAPA is a 501(c)(6) Not-for-profit that sets standards for facility and truck security to reduce cargo theft. The organization also provides training, education information sharing certification and risk management. Source: Transported Asset Protection Association Americas, "About Us" (Accessed on August 12, 2025), https://www.tapaonline.org/about-us

Background: How and Where Cargo Theft Occurs

In order to develop effective countermeasures to cargo theft, a clear understanding of where and how theft occurs is needed. Additionally, understanding the underlying risk factors will allow industry stakeholders to address theft vulnerabilities.

The nomenclature used by cargo theft stakeholders varies considerably, but a basic primer on types of cargo theft is useful.

Types of Theft. Cargo theft can be categorized into three primary forms.

- *Straight* – an entire load of cargo is *physically* stolen from a location, often with a carrier's truck/trailer/equipment.

> *The FBI refers to straight theft in the following terms: "when cargo is physically stolen from its current location. Cargo thieves often look for items they can steal and sell quickly. This often occurs at truck stops, parking lots, roadside parking, drop lots, rail yards and other situations where cargo is left unattended."*[5]

- *Pilferage* – this type of theft occurs when part of a load is stolen (instead of a full load), generally when a trailer is unattended. Pilferage is sometimes not discovered until final delivery of the cargo, often at a location different from where the crime occurred.[6] For example, pilferage may include tampering with a cargo seal and entering a parked trailer (e.g. at a rest stop) and stealing small amounts of goods.

> Additionally, the FBI states that pilferage can occur "when criminals alter the bill of lading and pilfer small amounts off the truck." [7]

- *Strategic* – planned and targeted theft of specific cargo, sometimes involving load boards, fleet/identity impersonation, and/or double-brokering.

> *The FBI refers to strategic theft in the following terms: "when thieves incorporate deceptive tactics to commit theft. This type of cargo theft involves the use of fraud to trick shippers, brokers, and carriers into handing loads over to thieves instead of the legitimate carrier. Other current strategic cargo theft trends include identity theft, fictitious pick-ups, account takeovers, double-brokering scams, and fraudulent carriers as well as the implementation of a combination of these methods."* [8]

[5] FBI, "Cargo Theft," *FBI — Transnational Organized Crime*, accessed September 11, 2025, https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/transnational-organized-crime/cargo-theft.
[6] National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB). "Cargo Theft." *National Insurance Crime Bureau*. Accessed September 11, 2025. https://www.nicb.org/prevent-fraud-theft/cargo-theft.
[7] FBI, "Cargo Theft," *FBI — Transnational Organized Crime*, accessed September 11, 2025, https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/transnational-organized-crime/cargo-theft.
[8] Ibid.

- Note: One tool used by criminals that is now receiving considerable national attention is double-brokering.[9] An example of double-brokering is as follows:

  1) Shipper A tenders freight to Broker A;
  2) Broker A – who should be hiring a carrier to move the freight – consigns the load to Broker B;
  3) Broker B then hires a carrier to transport the freight.

  In another scenario, a motor carrier may illegally broker a load to another carrier. Within these transactions the shipper may not give consent, for instance, or criminals may pose as legitimate brokers or carriers.

There is an increasing trend in the use of strategic theft (also referred to as theft by fraud) as shown in Table 2.[10]

Table 2: Shift from Straight Theft to Strategic Theft

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Straight Theft	97.8%	97.3%	95.9%	98.6%	91.1%	75.0%
Strategic Theft ("Theft by Fraud")	2.2%	2.7%	4.1%	1.4%	8.9%	25.0%

Understanding Cargo Theft by Facility Type. Over the course of a day or year, a truck and its cargo will travel through, stop and/or drop trailers at numerous facility types – both public and private.

Some location types are more vulnerable to theft than others. CargoNet's latest top-five ranked locations where thefts most often occur are:

1. Warehouse
2. Other (Unclassified Location)
3. Carrier Terminal/Lot
4. Parking Lot (Retail)
5. Truck Stop

[9] Mindy Long, "Reports of Double-Brokering Increase," *Transport Topics* (April 10, 2023), https://www.ttnews.com/articles/double-brokering-increases.

[10] Data in this table was provided to ATRI by CargoNet. Strategic Theft and Theft by Fraud are different terms to describe the same cargo theft activity.

Geography Matters in Cargo Theft. Data show that, not surprisingly, cargo thefts are more common near major freight and logistics hubs. Such locations are often in major cities with strained law enforcement, numerous busy interstate corridors, and significant freight activity. All of these factors help cargo thieves proceed undetected.

At the state level in 2023, available data indicate that 41 percent of total cargo thefts in the U.S. were reported to have occurred in the nation's most populous state, California.[11] An additional 12 percent of cargo thefts occurred in Texas, followed by Illinois and Tennessee (both 11% respectively).[12]

For urban areas, it is reported that trailer theft and trailer pilferage were reportedly highest in Los Angeles, Dallas-Fort Worth, Atlanta, and New York, which are all major transit points for goods.[13]

Major ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles combined with "sprawling logistics hubs like the Inland Empire," have made Southern California the leading target for cargo thieves.[14] Also, Texas' unique position along the Mexican border, coupled with its vast highway network similarly makes it a cargo theft hot spot.[15]

Other cities that have experienced spikes in cargo theft over the last few years include Chicago, Memphis, Houston, Miami, Savannah, and Newark.[16] Scott Cornell of Travelers Insurance noted in an article that most of these are coastal port cities, except for Memphis and Chicago. Theft has spread to cities like Chicago and Memphis "because they're basically inland ports with heavy rail and a heavy density in population."[17]

Cargo Thieves: What They are Stealing. Cargo thieves ultimately are interested in items that can be resold easily and without detection. "Food and beverage" is typically cited by CargoNet as the top category of stolen cargo.[18] Scott Cornell summarized the reasons why food, beverage and similar products are so often stolen in a discussion with CNBC in 2025:

> "*It's consumable. So, the evidence disappears … If you're a cargo theft investigator and you're trying to do a recovery investigation, the evidence is going be consumed, right? Or it's going to spoil. There's no barcode on a pistachio*."[19]

[11] Overhaul, "United States & Canada Annual Cargo Theft Report 2024" (Accessed on September 24, 2025),https://over-haul.com/usa-canada-cargo-theft-report-2024/.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Shyam Gotham, "Grand Theft Cargo," *Cross Dock Insights* (May 14, 2025), https://crossdockinsights.com/p/us-cargo-theft
[15] Ibid.
[16] Lori Ann LaRocco, "Cargo theft, led by food and beverage, is surging across the U.S.," *CNBC* (March 25, 2023), https://www.cnbc.com/2023/03/25/cargo-theft-led-by-food-and-beverage-is-surging-across-the-us.html#
[17] Ibid.
[18] Verisk, "2024 Supply Chain Risk Trends Analysis" (January 21, 2025), https://www.cargonet.com/news-and-events/cargonet-in-the-media/2024-theft-trends/.
[19] Courtney Reagan and Scott Zamost, "Cargo Thieves Attack Supply Chain," *CNBC* (May 9, 2025), https://www.cnbc.com/2025/05/09/cargo-thieves-attack-supply-chain.html.

In the same interview, household goods (cleaning supplies or toiletries, for instance, are difficult to trace and consumable) and electronics (which have a high value-to-weight but are more easily traced) were also mentioned as highly targeted goods.

Background: The Financial Costs of Cargo Theft

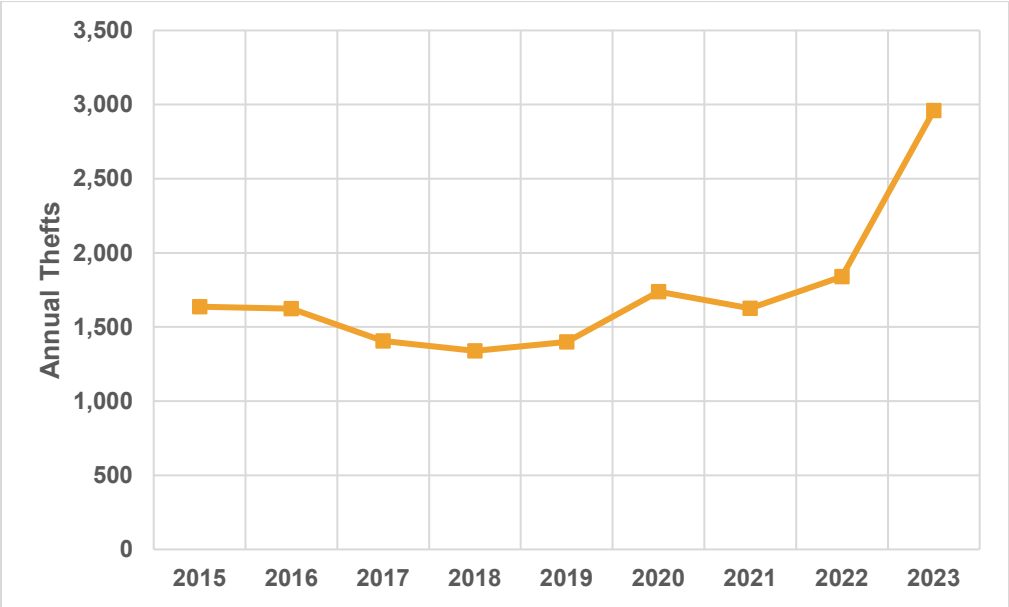
The ATRI survey data collected from motor carriers and logistics service providers focuses on cargo losses for calendar year 2023. In that same year, CargoNet received reports on 2,852 incidents from participating carriers, which amounted to $332 million worth of stolen cargo, with an average loss of $116,397 per incident.[20] This per-incident figure impacts supply chain stakeholders in multiple ways beyond direct financial losses, as described below.

> Operational Disruptions. First and foremost, supply chain operational disruptions occur when there is a cargo theft incident. The stolen cargo can disrupt plant operations, just-in-time manufacturing and/or final consumer needs and expectations. Within a motor carrier, cargo replacement activities can unexpectedly lock up additional truck drivers and equipment, all in an industry with record high costs and operating margins under 5 percent.[21]
>
> Indirect Financial Costs. Cargo theft will have insurance implications if the theft is reported to the insurer; consequences may include an increase in insurance premiums or the need to increase already large deductibles.
>
> Customer Relationships. Cargo theft can and does damage the carrier-customer relationship. Additionally, there may be disagreements over chain-of-custody responsibilities and liability arising from cargo theft.
>
> Truck Driver Impacts. The safety of truck drivers is at risk in cargo theft incidents – especially hijacking scenarios.[22] A theft may lead to driver retention issues, and the driver may face lost revenue and productivity if he or she is not driving in the immediate aftermath of a cargo theft incident.

Overall, these costs have been rising due to an increase in the number of incidents. CargoNet regularly reports increases in the number of theft reports they receive, as shown in Figure 1.

[20] Verisk, "2023 Supply Chain Risk Trends Analysis" (accessed October 24, 2024), https://www.cargonet.com/news-and-events/cargonet-in-the-media/2023-theft-trends/.
[21] Oscar Collins, "How Cargo Theft Unloads Problems on Global Supply Chains: A Closer Look," *Global Trade Magazine* (August 9, 2024), https://www.globaltrademag.com/how-cargo-theft-unloads-problems-on-global-supply-chains-a-closer-look/; Alex Leslie and Dan Murray, *An Analysis of the Operational Costs of Trucking: 2025 Update*, ATRI (July, 2025), https://truckingresearch.org/2025/07/an-analysis-of-the-operational-costs-of-trucking-2025-update/.
[22] Drew Leppert, "6 Methods Used by Criminals to Carry Out Cargo Theft," *Amarok Ultimate Perimeter Security* (accessed October 24, 2024), https://amarok.com/blog/6-methods-used-by-criminals-to-carry-out-cargo-theft/.

Figure 1: Annual Thefts Reported



Background: Cargo Theft Prevention Strategies

Theft prevention is a continuous and evolving effort and, in the case of strategic theft, one where adaptability is key. Protecting facilities and vehicles is foundational to a cargo theft prevention strategy. Relevant tasks include:

Protecting and Monitoring Facilities. Recognizing that carrier terminals/lots are hotspots for cargo theft, it is logical that countermeasures should begin at these facilities. TAPA has Facility Security Requirements (FSR) Standards that set "minimum standards for security and industry best practices for facilities storing and handling High-Value Thief-Targeted (HVTT) assets."[23] These protections include:

- Strategies and standards for facility perimeters and entry points;
- Workforce training and screening; and,
- Cyber security.

Protecting and Monitoring Trucks and Trailers. TAPA also has Truck Security Requirements (TSR) Standards that "set minimum security standards and best practices for over-the-road carriers of HVTT goods," and include specific frameworks for different

[23] TAPA Americas, "Steps to Certification" (Accessed on August 12, 2025), https://www.tapaonline.org/steps-to-certification; TAPA, "FSR 2023 Facility Security Requirements" (August 2023), https://tapa.memberclicks.net/assets/2023_FSR-TSR_Standards/2023-Standards-Final/FSR-2023-Standard.pdf; HVTT cargo is freight that is high in value, easy to handle, and can be easily sold. Some HVTT goods include pharmaceuticals, electronics, collectables, jewelry, etc.

types of trucks, including "hard-sided" trucks, at three different audit levels.[24] Categories covered include:

- Management support and responsibilities protocols;
- Tracking, training and on-route protocols;
- Workforce integrity;
- Physical security;
- Tracking technology and alarms
- Security procedures; and
- Driver security training.

How to Avoid Being Caught Up in Freight Fraud (e.g. Strategic Theft)
By Matt Minton, VP for Carrier Experience at C.H. Robinson

Fraud targeting the logistics industry continues to rise, with digital deception and fraudulent load postings impacting carriers, shippers, brokers and warehouses. Some estimate the industry has lost over $1 billion due to freight fraud. These schemes are increasingly sophisticated, so it is critical to watch for signs that you may be dealing with a cybercriminal or bad actor.

Best Practices to Avoid Phishing
Phishing is an attempt to get confidential information that a criminal can use to commit freight fraud. It often starts by tricking you into clicking on a link. In the case of spoofing, bad actors may impersonate someone else to first gain your trust. Some safety tips include:

- **Do not click on unexpected links or invitations to sign up with a third-party logistics provider (3PL) or a load board.** Just clicking on the link to check it out can make your computer or phone vulnerable to sensitive information being stolen. Definitely do not proceed with any process of setting up an account or providing a username or password.
- **Do not give out verification or multi-factor authentication (MFA) codes to anyone**. These are usually one-time codes provided anonymously for your data safety and privacy during a sign-up or log-in process. No legitimate business will ask you to share these codes. But criminals may send a fake MFA prompt, then pretend they are confirming your identity when they call to get the code.
- **Do not click on load postings or links to sites that require you to add username or password information unrelated to that site**. Understandably, some companies have partnerships. But be cautious when clicking on links in postings that claim to be directing you to the broker's site to complete booking. If you are not redirected to the company who would be paying you for the load, you are at risk.

[24] TAPA Americas, "Steps to Certification" (Accessed on August 12, 2025), https://www.tapaonline.org/steps-to-certification; TAPA, "Trucking Security Requirements TSR 2023" (2023), https://tapa.memberclicks.net/assets/2023_FSR-TSR_Standards/2023_TSR_Documents/TSR%202023%20Standard.pdf.

- **If you get an email or text that appears to be from a company or person you know, verify it is them before providing any sensitive information**. Look closely for misspellings in the company name or email address. For example: @chrobinson.com (valid) vs. @chrrobinson.com (fraudulent). If you have any doubts, go to that company's website or initiate contact yourself rather than responding to an email or text.
- **Confirm the phone number and the identity of incoming callers before disclosing any information**. Criminals can even spoof phone numbers to impersonate legitimate businesses. So, if there is a shred of doubt regarding the legitimacy of the call, hang up and dial the number on that company's website or a number you have history using.

Best Practices to Identify Fraudulent Load Postings

In addition to finding ways to steal your information to commit freight fraud, be aware that bad actors may also try to involve you in theft of freight. Here are some tips for steering clear.

- **Avoid "blind" shipments.** While they still exist for a small portion of load volumes, a blind shipment designation is often used by a bad actor planning to re-route a load instead of delivering it to the legitimate destination.
- **Look closely at the contact information**. Most legitimate brokers do not use Gmail or other non-company email addresses.
- **If a posted rate seems too good to be true, it probably is**. Bad actors lure honest carriers to participate in theft by offering rates well over-market. In today's market, if the load is paying $1,000 to go 150 miles same day or a local run is paying $700 for 30 miles, that's a sign of bad actors trying to get a carrier to help them move a load from a legitimate shipper to one of their partner warehouses.
- **Be wary of payment options**. Most 3PLs don't offer payment via PayPal or Zelle at the time of delivery, but this is a common trap used by cybercriminals.
- **Never agree to log in or check in somewhere under another carrier name**. If you are asked to, be aware you could become complicit in the fraudulent activity.

Background: Strengthening Partnerships with Law Enforcement

Cargo theft typically occurs in a cross-jurisdictional setting, which offers an advantage to thieves.[25] Goods stolen in one state are often taken across multiple jurisdictions, states or countries before they are eventually sold. This makes coordinating efforts between various law enforcement agencies difficult and time-consuming. This multiagency coordination and communication ultimately buys time for the thieves, further increasing the likelihood that stolen cargo remains unrecovered.

[25] Rachel Layne, "Clogged U.S. supply chains lead to cargo theft," *CBS News* (November 2, 2021), https://www.cbsnews.com/news/supply-chain-issues-cargo-theft/.

State-Level Responses. At the state-level, California and Texas have introduced tougher penalties for individuals involved in cargo theft. These include heavier fines and extended prison sentences for convicted offenders.[26] Other state-level activities include:

- *Georgia.* In 2014, Georgia made cargo theft its own criminal offense category and specified graduated sentences based on the value of the stolen goods (GA Code § 16-8-22 [2024]).[27] Within this statute, a conviction for cargo theft of more than $1,000,000 is punishable by 10 to 30 years in prison.[28]

- *Texas.* In Texas, laws pertaining specifically to cargo theft were codified in 2015 and amended in 2017, making it a felony if the value of the stolen cargo exceeds $1,500, with steeper penalties as the value increases (TX Penal Code § 31.18 [2024]).[29]

- *Alabama.* The State of Alabama has a similar law from 2016 (AL Code § 13A-8-10.6 [2024]) that also contains graduated penalties based on the value of cargo stolen.[30]

- *California.* In 2024, California passed into law Assembly Bill 1972, which "directs the California Highway Patrol to work with railroad police to target cargo theft," and would "specify cargo theft as a property crime for consideration by the regional property crimes task force." [31]

- *Florida.* In 2024, Florida signed into law tougher penalties for retail theft, including specific provisions for designating cargo theft as a "grand theft."[32]

[26] Governor Gavin Newson, "Governor Newsom signs "smash and grab" bill to strengthen felony sentences for large-scale theft offenses" (September 12, 2024), https://www.gov.ca.gov/2024/09/12/governor-newsom-signs-smash-and-grab-bill-to-strengthen-felony-sentences-for-large-scale-theft-offenses/; Code of Crim. Proc. Article 13.08, "Theft; Organized Retail Theft; Cargo Theft," *Texas Public Law* (accessed June 5, 2024), https://texas.public.law/statutes/tex._code_of_crim._proc._article_13.08#google_vignette.

[27] Christina A. Cassidy, "New Georgia laws begin Tuesday," *The Augusta Chronicle* (June 30, 2014), https://www.augustachronicle.com/story/news/politics/government/2014/06/30/new-georgia-laws-begin-tuesday/14406591007/; Georgia General Assembly. *Bill No. 137482*, 2013-2014 Regular Session, (accessed September 11, 2025), https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/legislation/document/20132014/137482.

[28] Georgia Code § 16-8-22 (added by 2014 Ga. Laws 507, § 1; eff. July 1, 2014) (Accessed September 18, 2025), https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/title-16/chapter-8/article-1/section-16-8-22/

[29] Texas Penal Code § 31.18 (Accessed September 18, 2025), https://law.justia.com/codes/texas/penal-code/title-7/chapter-31/section-31-18/

[30] Alabama Code § 13A-8-10.6 (Accessed September 18, 2025), https://law.justia.com/codes/alabama/title-13a/chapter-8/article-1/section-13a-8-10-6/

[31] California Legislature, *Assembly Bill 1972*, 2023–2024 Regular Session (Accessed September 11, 2025) https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billStatusClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB1972; Nigel Duara, "Gavin Newsom signs new retail theft laws as voters weigh even tougher penalties," *Cal Matters* (August 16, 2024), https://calmatters.org/justice/2024/08/retail-theft-new-laws/; California Legislature, *Assembly Bill 1972*, 2023–2024 Regular Session (Accessed September 11, 2025) https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billStatusClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB1972.

[32] Michael Moline, "DeSantis signs tougher penalties for retail theft, 'porch piracy,' into law," *Florida Phoenix*, (April 9, 2024), https://floridaphoenix.com/2024/04/09/desantis-signs-tougher-penalties-for-retail-theft-porch-piracy-into-law/; Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 549 (Approved by Governor: April 9, 2024), https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2024/549.

- *Minnesota.* Proposed legislation in Minnesota and other states would create an advisory board to combat cargo theft along with other related crimes such as retail theft.[33]

Federal Response. At the federal level, a proposed bill in Congress, Combating Organized Retail Crime Act (CORCA) would "establish an Organized Retail and Supply Chain Crime Coordination Center within Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)."[34] According to the sponsor, the goal of this legislation is to increase collaboration "between federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, along with retail crime associations and subject matter experts, to create a cohesive strategy to combat these crimes and share valuable resources."[35]

Background: Insurance and Risk Management

The trucking industry relies on several primary components of commercial auto insurance, with the main policy types being:

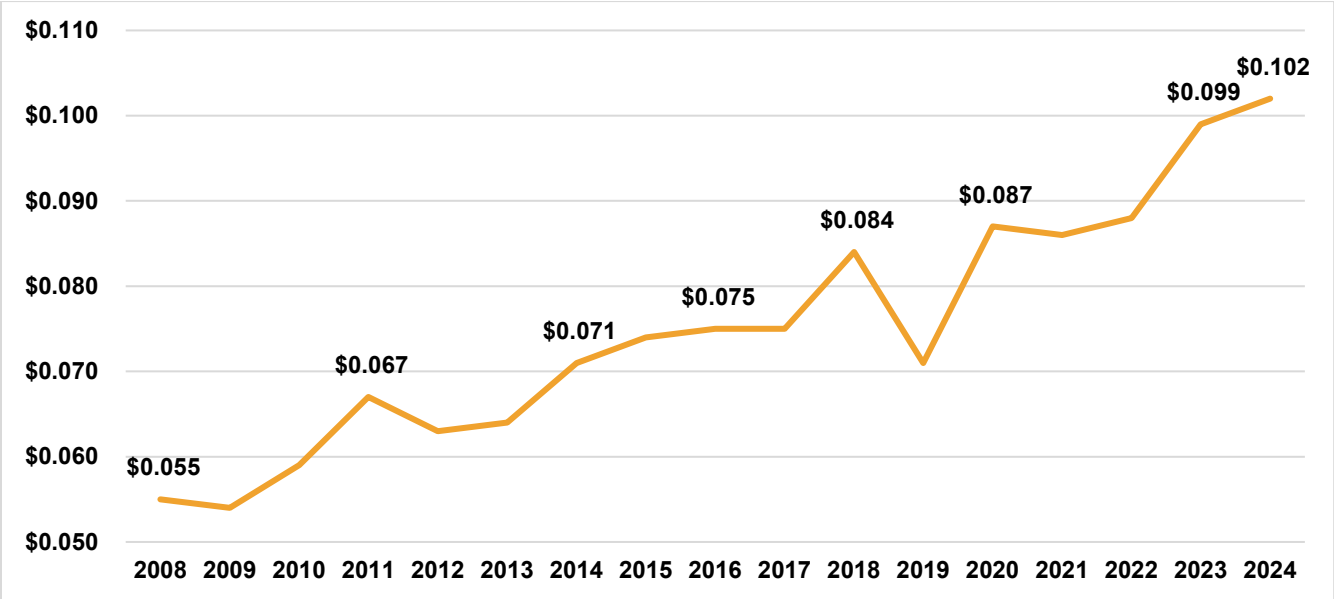
1. Primary Auto Liability. This coverage protects against damage to other people or their property caused by the insured's truck.

2. Physical Damage. This protects against damage to or loss of the insured's truck or trailer.

3. Cargo. This covers the cargo being transported by a trucking company. In general, insurance rates have been rising for a number of years with per-mile insurance costs nearly doubling since 2008, as shown in Figure 2.[36]

[33] Minnesota Legislature, *House File 2879 (HF 2879), 94th Session (2025–2026)* (Accessed September 11, 2025) https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2879&version=0&session=ls94&session_year=2025&session_number=0.
[34] David P. Joyce, "Joyce Introduces Bipartisan, Bicameral Legislation to Bolster Federal Response to Organized Retail Crime." (April 10, 2025) https://joyce.house.gov/posts/joyce-introduces-bipartisan-bicameral-legislation-to-bolster-federal-response-to-organized-retail-crime.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Alex Leslie and Dan Murray, *An Analysis of the Operational Costs of Trucking: 2025 Update*, ATRI (July, 2025), https://truckingresearch.org/2025/07/an-analysis-of-the-operational-costs-of-trucking-2025-update/.

Figure 2: Insurance Rates Per Mile (Combined Liability and Cargo)



Ultimately, with insurance costs rising, trucking companies will implement any available measure to stabilize or reduce these costs. Such measures include not reporting a cargo theft incident, particularly when it is a lower-value theft or can be handled without insurance company involvement. This may help alleviate future premium increases.

With the increase in cargo theft, insurance companies are assessing fleet onboarding and risk management practices.[37] Insurance industry strategies include:

- Raising premiums for high-value or frequently targeted products;
- Re-assessing risk, including routes through high-risk areas; and
- Requiring specific security practices.

One insurer stated, "*you might not be able to get insurance on a high-value pharmaceutical load unless you can show documentation of geofencing, tamper-proof seals, vendor vetting, and other things like that*."[38]

[37] Joanna Marsh, "Fleets and Insurers Respond to Freight Theft Surge," *Transport Topics* (March 25, 2025) https://www.ttnews.com/articles/fleets-insurers-cargo-theft; Gia Snape, "Cargo Theft at Record Highs: What Brokers Need to Know," *Insurance Business America* (August 21, 2025) https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com/us/news/breaking-news/cargo-theft-at-record-highs-what-brokers-need-to-know-546996.aspx.

[38] Joanna Marsh, "Fleets and Insurers Respond to Freight Theft Surge," *Transport Topics*, March 25, 2025, https://www.ttnews.com/articles/fleets-insurers-cargo-theft.

DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

Survey Data Collection

To gather data on the impact of cargo theft, structured, confidential surveys were developed for motor carriers, logistics service providers, and for commercial auto insurers. The surveys were designed to quantify and analyze cargo theft metrics and issues across the U.S. trucking industry to identify the scale of the cargo theft problem, factors that influence rates of cargo theft and theft countermeasures. Questions related to experiences with law enforcement and insurance companies were also included in the surveys.

The first two surveys were distributed by ATRI through a press release to its stakeholder contact list, through LinkedIn, and promoted at multiple industry meetings. Respondents could input data online or through a PDF format.[39] The survey instruments can be found in Appendix A.

Each survey response was evaluated individually, and the final survey response dataset used in the analysis was cleansed of incomplete and irregular/unclear responses.

Since the surveys were released near the end of 2024, questions focused on annual theft data from 2023 or prior. In addition to the motor carrier and LSP analyses, a brief analysis of insurance data is included in the Survey Findings section of the report.

Case Study Data Collection

The ATRI research team also conducted interviews with numerous motor carriers, shippers and logistics service providers. Cargo theft experiences with three of these companies were eventually developed into detailed case studies. The case studies include a large logistics provider and freight carrier, a 100-truck regional carrier and an international shipper.

The case studies were based on interviews and data provided by each company, who later reviewed their respective case studies for accuracy. The case studies highlight individual experiences with cargo theft, theft descriptions, lessons learned and theft prevention strategies.

It should be noted that the calculations generated and used in this research often have multiple decimal places and may not add to 100 percent due to rounding. Tables where numeric rounding occurs are marked in the report with an asterisk (*).

[39] ATRI, “ATRI Seeks Motor Carrier and Freight Broker Input on Industry’s Cargo Theft Crisis” (August 19, 2024), https://truckingresearch.org/2024/08/atri-seeks-motor-carrier-and-freight-broker-input-on-industrys-cargo-theft-crisis/.

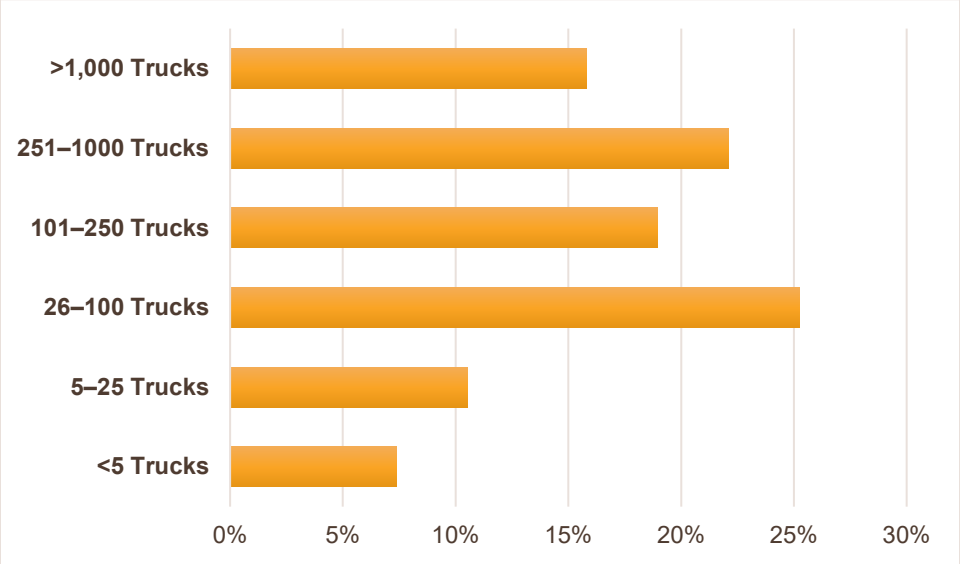
SURVEY FINDINGS

Motor Carrier Survey: Summary Statistics

The motor carrier cargo theft survey was completed by 95 for-hire motor carriers, representing a total of nearly 90,000 trucks. Respondent fleet size ranged from 1 to more than 10,000 trucks; the average respondent fleet size was 946 trucks, while the median was 145. Thus, similar to the population of the trucking industry, the majority of respondents were smaller fleets, though there was representation from a handful of very large carriers that operate thousands of trucks.

Respondent sizes were mixed, with the largest category of carrier size in the 26-100 truck range; this distribution, shown in Figure 3, is in line with other ATRI reports such as the *Operational Cost of Trucking.*[40]

Figure 3: Respondent Fleet Size



The largest group of respondents primarily operated Truckload Dry Van (42%) followed by Refrigerated (16%) and Intermodal (13%). The remaining carriers were less-than-truckload (LTL), Other, Tanker and Flatbed (Table 3).

[40] Alex Leslie, and Dan Murray, *An Analysis of the Operational Costs of Trucking: 2025 Update*. ATRI, (July, 2025), https://truckingresearch.org/2025/07/an-analysis-of-the-operational-costs-of-trucking-2025-update/.

Table 3: Respondent Operation Type

Operation Type	% of Respondents
Truckload Dry Van	42.1%
Refrigerated Van	15.8%
Intermodal	12.6%
LTL	9.5%
Tanker	6.3%
Flatbed	4.2%
Other	9.5%

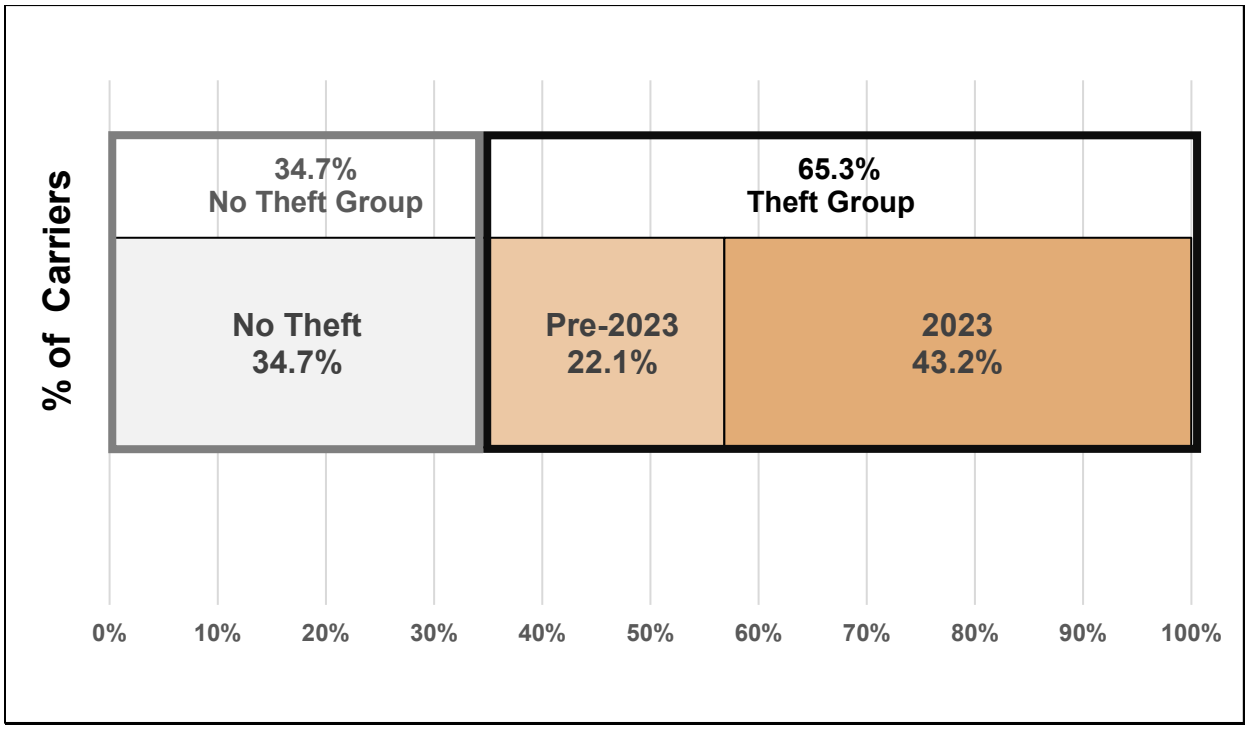
Motor Carriers: Scale of Theft

To understand the scale and impact of cargo theft, it was important to receive feedback from carriers who had and had not experienced cargo theft. Thus, the survey was designed and distributed without any prerequisite that a carrier must have past cargo theft incidents to participate.

Respondents were first asked if they had experienced one or more cargo theft incidents in 2023 or in a year prior. Slightly more than one in three carriers (34.7%) had never experienced cargo theft. This group is described as the "No Theft Group" throughout the report. The majority of respondents (65.3%) did, however, experience a cargo theft incident in 2023 or prior. This group is described as the "Theft Group."

Within the Theft Group of motor carrier respondents there are two subgroups: those who experienced a cargo theft in 2023 (43.2% of all respondents) which is called the "2023 Theft Group", and those who had one or more cargo theft *prior* to 2023 (22.1% of all respondents). The latter is named the "Pre-2023 Theft Group." (Figure 4). These two subgroups were created to determine the direction of cargo theft over time.

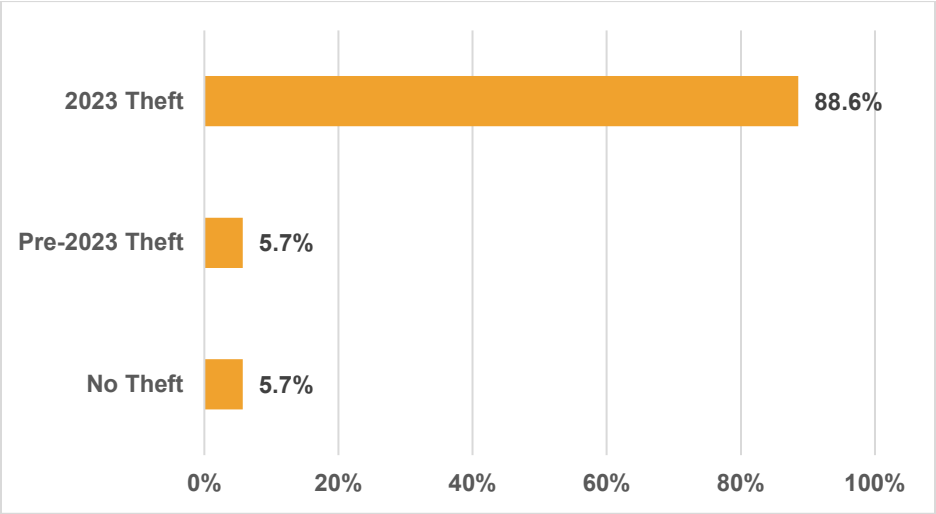
Figure 4: Motor Carrier Experience with Cargo Theft



The two time-period groups were also analyzed by percent of registered trucks that were in fleets who had experienced a cargo theft.

Among all the respondents' trucks, 94.3 percent were registered to a carrier who had experienced cargo theft at some point (Theft Group carriers), and 88.6 percent were registered to carriers who had experienced cargo theft in the most recent year, 2023. These statistics are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Percent of Trucks Registered with a Carrier that has Experienced Cargo Theft



LSP Survey: Summary Statistics

The logistics service provider (LSP) survey was completed by 28 transportation logistics companies. These included respondents that operate as one or more of the following:

Broker. A broker is a non-asset-based entity that matches shippers with motor carriers to move freight from an origin to a destination.

Third-Party Logistics (3PL) Provider. A 3PL manages specific freight movement within a customer's supply chain to fulfil orders, distribute goods and manage customer inventories. Some 3PLs have assets and some do not.

Logistics Company. A logistics company fully manages freight movement and warehousing for a customer; they are typically asset-based (owning warehouses, equipment and/or trucks).

LSPs use a variety of methods to move goods for their customers. Thus, when asked what services were offered, the answers covered all aspects of trucking. All but one LSP offered truckload dry van services, followed by flatbed and refrigerated (see Table 4).

Table 4: LSP Services Offered*

Service Offered	%
Truckload Dry Van	96.4%
Flatbed	85.7%
Refrigerated Van	82.1%
Less-Than-Truckload	75.0%
Intermodal Containers	57.1%
Specialized – Oversize / Overweight	53.6%
Tanker	35.7%
Express / Parcel Services	32.1%
Automotive Transportation	25.0%
Household Goods Mover	21.4%
Other	14.3%

LSPs: Scale of Theft

Similar to the motor carrier survey, the LSP survey did not require that respondents have past experience with cargo theft.

Respondents were asked if they had experienced a cargo theft incident in the past using the same answer categories as the motor carrier survey (answer options were yes in 2023; yes but prior to 2023; and never).

Nearly all respondents (92.9%) indicated they had experienced cargo theft during 2023. The remaining two respondents had not experienced cargo theft.

Survey Findings: How and Where Theft Occurs

A carrier's likelihood of experiencing cargo theft is based on a number of factors which include size of the operation, operation type, the type of goods hauled and geography. Survey questions were designed for both motor carriers and LSPs to create rank-ordered lists of risks and vulnerabilities and offer indicators of where countermeasures should be focused.

Types of Theft

The Theft Group from each survey was asked to identify the types of theft they experienced; these were then compiled into an industry average for motor carriers, and an industry average for LSPs.

Among motor carriers, pilferage (where some freight is stolen from a shipment) was the most common response (Table 5). The majority of LSPs, however, indicated that strategic theft was

most common at 62.5 percent. These results are not surprising since LSPs typically rely on digital transactions more than motor carriers

Table 5: Type of Theft*

Theft Type	Motor Carrier Results	LSP Results
Straight	31.5%	25.7%
Strategic	20.3%	62.5%
Pilferage	39.9%	11.8%
Other	8.3%	0.0%

Theft Group motor carriers and Theft Group LSPs were next asked if they had a truck or trailer stolen as part of a cargo theft. Among the Theft Group motor carrier respondents, 41.9 percent also lost a truck or trailer as part of a theft. For LSPs the figure was only 10.3 percent.

This same Theft Group was asked if they had ever suspected or known that an employee was involved in a cargo theft incident (i.e. an inside job). Among the motor carrier respondents experiencing cargo theft, 23.3 percent had known of or suspected that one or more of their cargo theft incidents were an inside job. The figure for LSPs was 4.1 percent. This difference is not surprising, especially in cases of pilferage, considering many of the LSPs do not have employees physically handling freight.

Finally, all motor carrier survey respondents were asked whether their U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) motor carrier (MC) number had been stolen and used to steal cargo. Only 4.7 percent were aware of such an incident.

Theft by Facility Type

Theft Group respondents in both motor carrier and LSP categories were asked to distribute their total thefts across eight location types; the results were then normalized across each survey group so that each respondent had the same weight for their answer (Table 6). For motor carriers, there was a moderate level of diversity among the answers, though “Your Terminal” was the most frequent theft occurrence location at 24.3 percent followed by “Other Overnight Parking Location.” For LSP’s, responses were dominated by the “Customer Pick-Up Location category (50.5%).

Table 6: Location of Theft by Facility Type*

Facility Type	Motor Carrier	LSP
Your Terminal	**24.3%**	12.1%
Other Overnight Parking Location	19.4%	5.7%
Truckstop / Rest Area	16.9%	12.6%
Customer Delivery Location	14.2%	2.6%
Customer Pick-up Location	8.5%	**50.5%**
Port / Intermodal Terminal	7.3%	4.2%
Other location	4.7%	9.1%
Don't Know	4.3%	3.3%

For motor carrier respondents, the large number of "Your Terminal" responses suggests that their top theft type, pilferage, frequently occurs at this location type. This speaks to the need for secure facilities and access to facilities by trusted/vetted people only. For the LSP responses, there is a clear link between the strategic theft that greatly impacts LSPs, and goods being misdirected or stolen from customer pick-up locations.

Geography Matters in Cargo Theft

Theft Group respondents in both motor carrier and LSP categories were asked to list up to five states where they had experienced cargo theft. States were first scored by how many times they were identified by individual respondents in each survey category, with the top five shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Top States for Cargo Theft as Identified by Survey Respondents

Rank	Motor Carrier	LSP
1	California	California
2	Illinois	Texas
3	Florida	Illinois
4	Texas	Georgia
5	Georgia	Florida and Tennessee (tie)

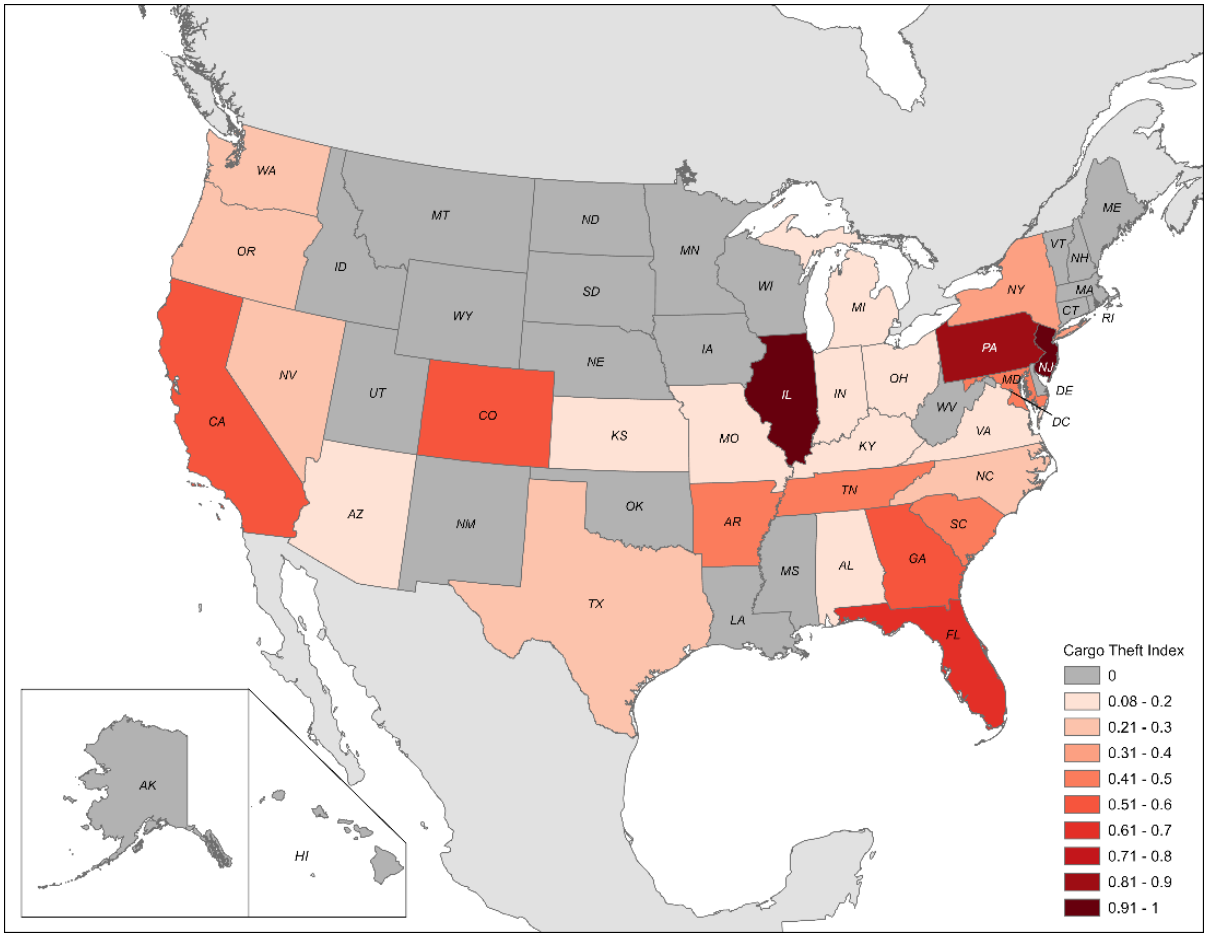
This basic rank-ordering shows the same five states for motor carriers and LSPs (though Tennessee showed up as a tie with Florida in the LSP category). The overlap between high population centers and rail/port/intermodal densities makes those states likely candidates for cargo theft activity.

Motor Carrier State Index

The research team developed an index to identify the severity of cargo theft relative to each state's total freight activity, as measured by total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by tractor-trailers annually.[41]

For motor carriers, the results were indexed against the highest-scoring state – New Jersey – having an index of 1.00, followed closely by Illinois (0.97). States that were not identified by respondents received a score of zero (0). The results are mapped in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Motor Carrier Cargo Theft State Index



The top ten states by index value are listed below in Table 8.

[41] Federal Highway Administration, "Highway Statistics Series: Distribution of Annual Vehicle Distance Traveled – 2023, Table VM-4" (November 19, 2024), https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2023/vm4.cfm; Federal Highway Administration, "Highway Statistics Series: Function System Travel – 2023, Table VM-2" (November 19, 2024), https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2023/vm2.cfm.

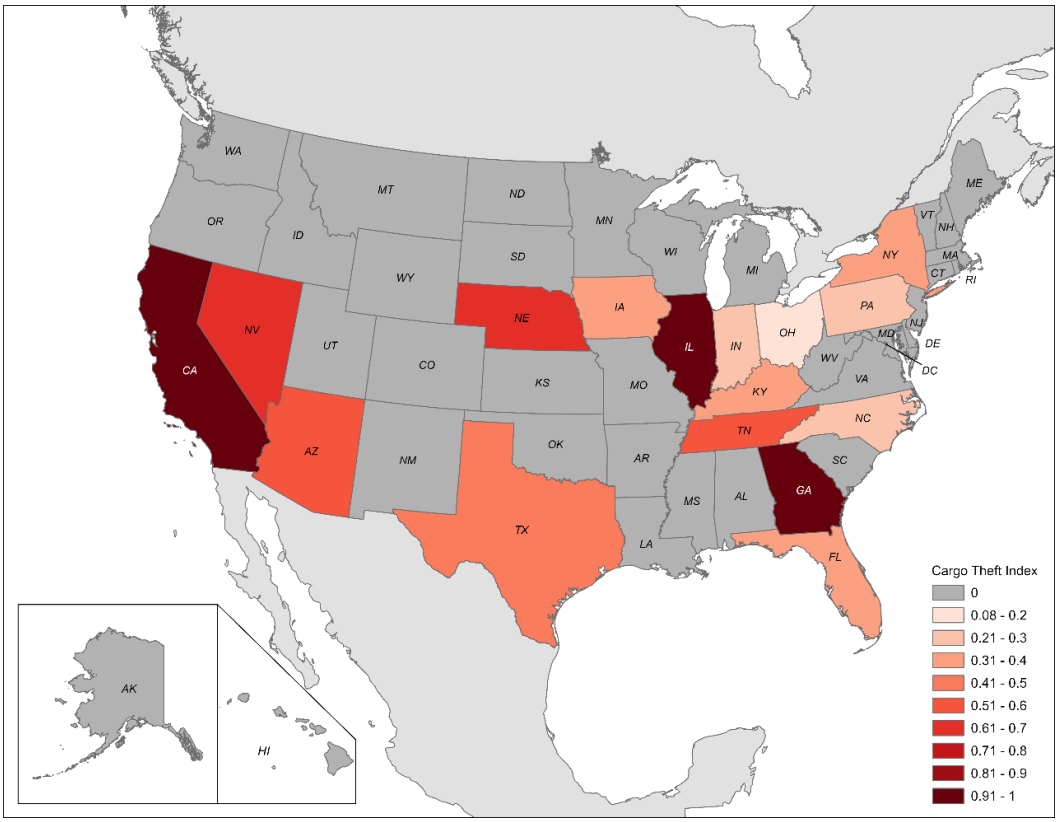
Table 8: Motor Carrier Top Ten States by ATRI Cargo Theft Index

Rank	State	Index
1	New Jersey	1.00
2	Illinois	0.97
3	Pennsylvania	0.84
4	Florida	0.70
5	Georgia	0.60
6	Colorado	0.52
7	California	0.51
8	Tennessee	0.47
9	Arkansas	0.45
10	South Carolina and Maryland (Tied)	0.40

LSP State Index

An equivalent index of cargo thefts relative to freight activity was next generated for LSPs, again using VMT as an indicator of total freight activity for each state (Figure 7).

Figure 7: LSP Cargo Theft State Index



While New Jersey was the top state in the motor carrier index, it was not identified by LSPs as a place where they had experienced cargo theft (Table 9). The top state in LSP the index was, instead, Illinois (1.00) – the second-highest state in the motor carrier index – followed by California (0.98) and Georgia (0.92)

Table 9: Top Ten States by ATRI Cargo Theft Index (LSP)

Rank	State	Index
1	Illinois	1.00
2	California	0.98
3	Georgia	0.92
4	Nebraska	0.61
5	Nevada	0.60
6	Arizona	0.59
7	Tennessee	0.58
8	Texas	0.40
9	Florida	0.39
10	Iowa	0.33

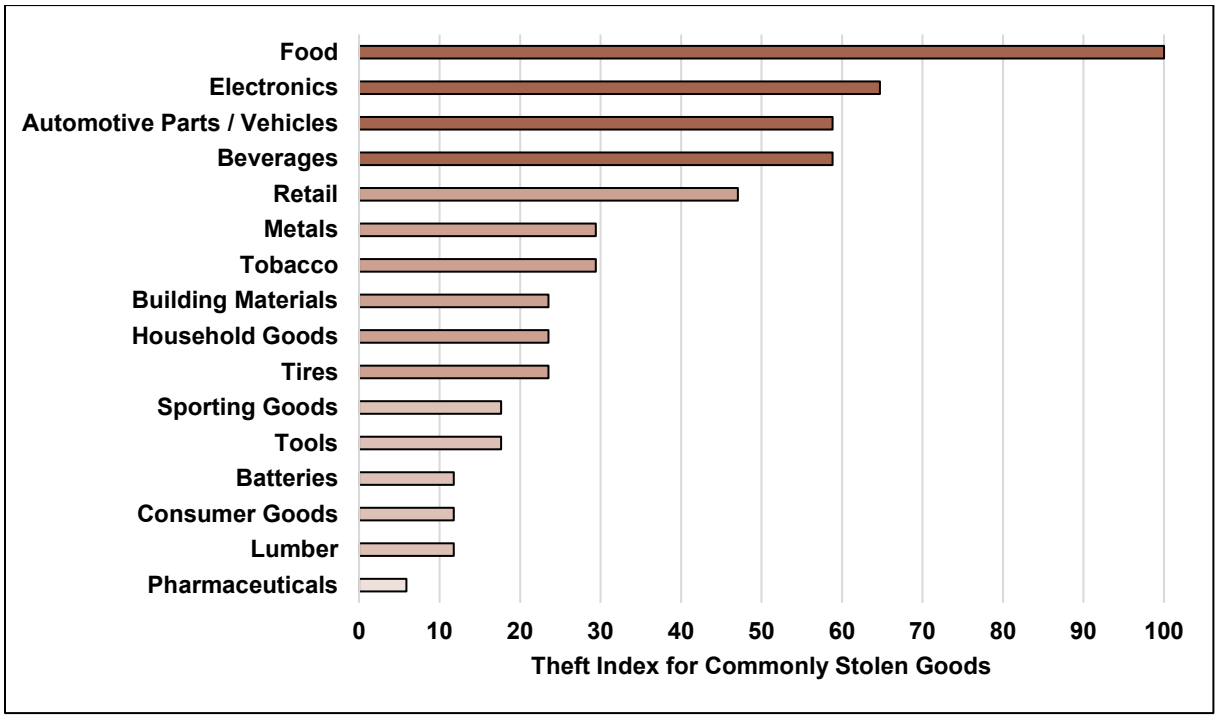
The higher index numbers for California and Georgia in particular among the LSPs suggests that these states are bigger targets for strategic theft and thefts at customer locations. By contrast, the much higher index metric for New Jersey and Pennsylvania among motor carriers suggests that these states are bigger targets for pilferage and thefts at carrier terminals. Finally, it should be noted that Illinois is very prominent on both lists, with a rank of one in the LSP index and two in the motor carriers index.

Cargo Thieves: What They are Stealing

ATRI asked only the motor carrier Theft Group respondents to identify the most frequently stolen cargo. Respondents were given the option to list up to 10 products in rank-order through an open-ended question. The open-ended answers were coded into logical, distinct categories (for instance, separate answers of eggs and bacon would both be categorized as food). The ranked categories were converted to an index for the commonly stolen goods categories (Figure 8).[42]

[42] Within the responses no respondent listed more than 8 products. The scoring was done by assigning an 8 to the most stolen freight type listed, a 7 to the second one listed, and so on. These scores were then compiled by type of stolen good and an index was created where the top score (food) was given a score of 100 and all other products were scaled to that score in the index.

Figure 8: Theft Index for Commonly Stolen Goods



Two of the top items on the list, food and beverages, may typically be low value but can be readily sold and quickly consumed. Electronics, auto parts and retail, on the other hand, are often higher value items but are often not as easy to sell in the marketplace.

Bottom Line: How and Where Cargo Theft Occurs

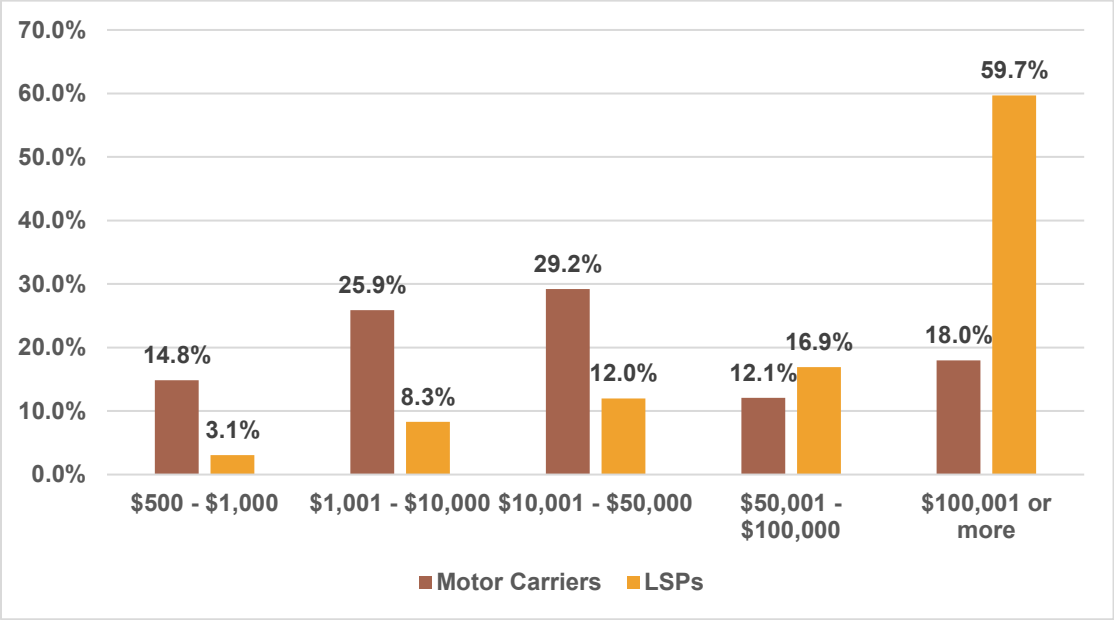
- *Pilferage is the most common issue for motor carriers (39.9%), strategic theft is most common for LSPs (62.5%)*
- *Motor carriers are most likely to see theft from their own terminal (24.3%), an overnight parking location (19.4%) or a rest stop/truck stop (16.9%). Theft from an LSP is most likely to occur at customer pick-up locations (50.5%).*
- *California is at the top of the list of states where thefts occur for motor carriers and LSPs. Illinois, Texas, Georgia, Florida and Tennessee round out the top list.*
- *Food is the most likely target of thieves, followed by electronics, automotive parts and beverages.*

Survey Findings: The Financial Costs of Cargo Theft

Theft Group motor carriers were asked to provide theft counts by cargo value bins. Averages for each company were produced, and then an average across all responding fleets was calculated. The most common cargo theft incident value was in the $10,001 - $50,000 range, followed by those in the $1,001 - $10,000 range (Figure 9).

Identical to the motor carrier respondents, LSPs were asked to indicate how many thefts occurred in those same cargo value bins. The LSP thefts tended to be much higher theft values per incident, and the majority of incidents (59.7%) exceeded $100,000.

Figure 9: Average Value of Cargo Stolen*



Each firm in the 2023 Theft Group in both motor carriers and LSPs categories was asked to provide the total value of cargo stolen in 2023. The total cargo theft value was then summed for all respondents, along with number of trucks and number of theft incidents.

Motor Carrier Financial Impacts

For the motor carriers, a total of $16,155,207 in cargo value was stolen in 555 separate incidents during 2023. The respondent companies that experienced theft in 2023 represented 42,115 registered trucks. The per-truck incident rate was approximately one incident per 75.8 registered trucks.

The average annual loss per carrier was approximately $521,000 (though larger carriers tended to have greater losses). The average loss per incident was $29,108 and the loss per registered truck was $383.60 (Table 10).

Table 10: Key Cargo Loss Statistics for Motor Carriers that Experienced Theft in 2023*

Statistic	Finding
Number of 2023 Incidents	555
2023 Total Value (n=31)	$16,155,207
Total Truck Units	42,115
Average Annual Loss per Carrier	$521,135
Median Annual Loss per Carrier	$65,000
Average Cargo Value per Incident	$29,108
Loss per Registered Truck	$383.60

To estimate the total value of cargo stolen from the U.S. trucking industry in 2023, the annual loss per truck figure in Table 10 ($383.60) was extrapolated to the full U.S. population of registered combination trucks (which was approximately 2,758,682 in 2019).[43]

It is important to note that this research does not capture cargo theft losses for straight trucks or smaller commercial vehicles.

The research team employed two approaches to develop an estimate based on the sample responses. The first approach assumed that the 43.16 percent of motor carriers that experienced a 2023 cargo theft incident would represent 43.16 percent of the registered trucks (or 1.19 million trucks).

The second approach assumed that the 88.58 percent of trucks represented in the survey by carriers experiencing cargo theft in 2023 was a valid approximation that would represent 2.44 million trucks.

Table 11 shows the results from the two approaches.

Table 11: Total Stolen Cargo Value Estimates for the U.S.*

	Number of Trucks Impacted	Loss per Truck	Annual U.S. Stolen Cargo Value Estimate 2023
Approach 1	1,190,647	$383.60	$456,732,189
Approach 2	2,443,641	$383.60	$937,380,687

[43] Federal Highway Administration, "Highway Statistics Series: Truck and Truck-Tractor Registrations – 2019" (November 2020), https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2019/.

But when cargo theft occurs, the costs are not limited just to the value of the goods. Carrier downtime is another issue. One motor carrier estimates that truckload revenue is $3,971 per week – when a truck is stolen and needs to be tracked down or replaced, this revenue is lost to the motor carrier.[44] Impacts are experienced across the supply chain as well. For a shipper, impacts include the following:[45]

- Delayed product for retailers/consumers;
- Lost margin (the difference between the item stolen and the retail value);
- Fraudulent refunds for stolen items; and
- Lost sales (e.g. when the product stolen from a shipper is sold at a discount, it competes directly with items that are sold in a legitimate setting).

One rule of thumb that analysts have used to estimate the full impact of theft across the supply chain was developed through a report by RAND that calculates the indirect costs of cargo theft.[46] The report offers examples of indirect costs of 3 to 6 times the value of cargo stolen. These indirect costs are totaled in the following matrix using the range of costs from our motor carrier survey (Table 12).

Table 12: Direct and Indirect Cargo Theft Estimate 2023*

Cost	Low Cargo Value Low Indirect Cost	High Cargo Value Low Indirect Cost	Low Cargo Value High Indirect Cost	High Cargo Value High Indirect Cost
Direct Costs	$456,732,189	$937,380,687	$456,732,189	$937,380,687
Indirect Costs	$1,370,196,567	$2,812,142,061	$2,740,393,134	$5,624,431,428
TOTAL	**$1,826,928,756**	**$3,749,522,748**	**$3,197,125,323**	**$6,561,836,666**

LSP Financial Impacts

These estimated costs pertain only to motor carriers and shippers and likely do not capture all costs associated with LSP losses. To better understand thefts beyond this group, the Theft Group LSPs were also asked to provide the number of thefts in 2023 and the value of the stolen cargo (Table 13).

[44] Schneider National, Inc. "Schneider National, Inc. Announces Third Quarter 2024 Results." *Schneider National, Inc. (Investor Relations/BUSINESS WIRE)*, 6 Nov. 2024, investors.schneider.com/news-events/financial-news/news-details/2024/Schneider-National-Inc.-Announces-Third-Quarter-2024-Results/default.aspx.
[45] "*In-Transit Cargo Theft: Impacting the Retail Supply Chain.*" *Loss Prevention Media*, accessed September 18, 2025, https://losspreventionmedia.com/in-transit-cargo-theft-impacting-the-retail-supply-chain/
[46] Dertouzos, James N., Eric V. Larson, and Patricia A. Ebener. *The Economic Costs and Implications of High-Technology Hardware Theft.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1999. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1070.html

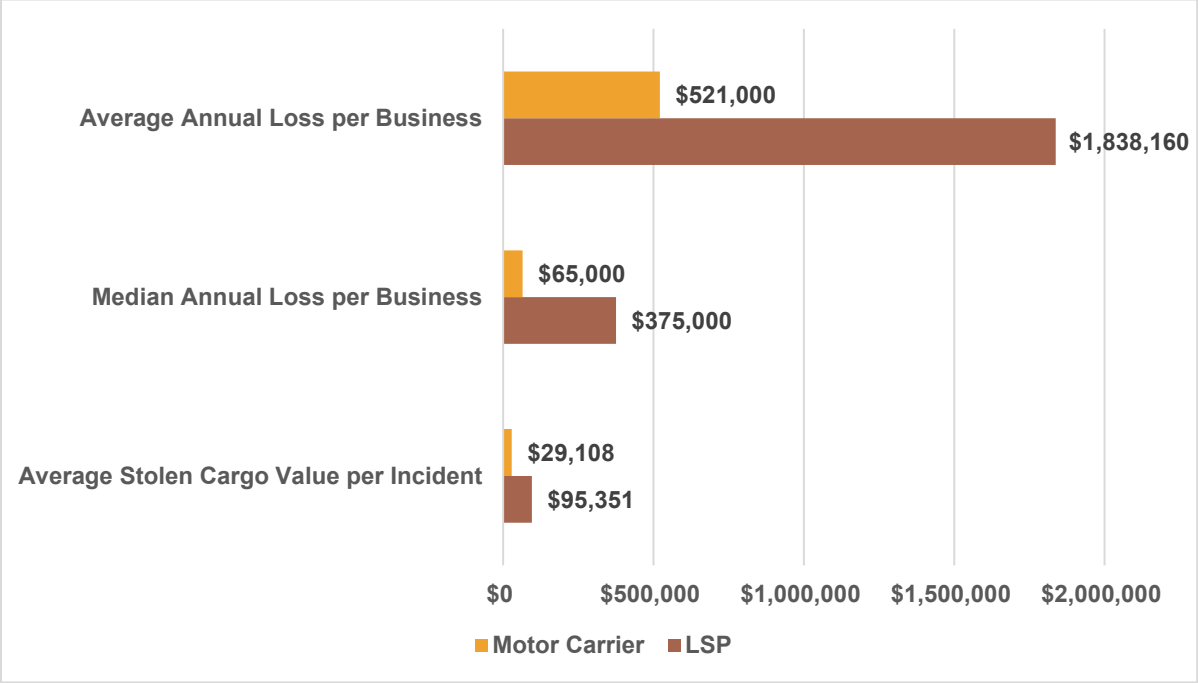
Table 13: Key Cargo Loss Statistics for LSPs*

Statistic	Finding
Number of 2023 Incidents	347
2023 Total Value (n=18)	$33,086,887
Average Annual Loss per LSP	$1,838,160
Median Annual Loss per LSP	$375,000
Average Cargo Value per Incident	$95,351

Motor Carrier vs LSP Financial Impacts

The annual average loss per respondent business was 3.5 times higher for LSPs than for motor carriers (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Value of Stolen Cargo Statistics for Motor Carrier and LSP Respondents



Theft Group motor carriers were asked to estimate the percentage of cargo recovered from cargo theft incidents, and an industry average was then produced. The results show that a large percentage of cargo stolen from motor carriers (73.5%) is never recovered.

Theft Group LSPs were also asked about stolen cargo recovery rates; the responses indicate that, overall, far more cargo is recovered by LSPs than by motor carriers (Table 14).

Table 14: Stolen Cargo Recovered

Percent Recovered	Percent of Motor Carriers	Percent of LSPs
None (0%)	73.5%	21.4%
< 5%	12.2%	7.1%
5% - 25%	2.0%	21.4%
25% - 75%	4.1%	28.6%
75% - 95%	6.1%	0.0%
> 95%	0.0%	0.0%
All (100%)	2.0%	21.4%

Several factors likely contribute to this difference. As shown earlier, LSPs tend to be the victims of larger-value thefts and, therefore, may have a greater financial interest in recovery. This may include assigning internal resources to work with investigators.

For motor carriers, however, the largest theft category was pilferage. While these losses can add up, there is far less incentive to investigate small thefts, especially since their small size makes them less easy to track and recover.

Finally, 2023 Theft Group respondents in both motor carrier and LSP categories were asked if they experienced more theft in 2023 than the year prior. All respondents (100%) indicated that their number of cargo theft incidents in 2023 increased over prior years.

Bottom Line: The Financial Costs of Cargo Theft

- *The majority of motor carrier cargo thefts (69.9%) are below $50,000; the majority of LSP cargo thefts (59.7%) are above $100,000.*
- *For responding motor carriers providing 2023 theft data, $16.15 million was stolen in 555 incidents at an average loss of $29,108 per incident.*
    - *When extrapolated to all motor carriers in the U.S., the total value of goods stolen from motor carriers ranges from $456.7 million to $937.4 million.*
- *For responding LSPs providing 2023 theft data, $33.1 million was stolen in 347 incidents at an average loss of $95,351 per incident.*

Survey Results: Cargo Theft Prevention Strategies

To better understand successful cargo theft mitigation strategies, all respondents in both MOTOR CARRIER and LSP categories were asked to list, in rank order, the most effective strategies they have used for preventing cargo theft.

Motor Carriers: Cargo Theft Prevention Strategies

Responses were grouped into three theft prevention targets – driver, company and equipment/facility-based approaches.

Driver-Based Strategies. Drivers are a key component of cargo theft prevention. Drivers "possess" the cargo between origin and destination, and therefore need to continuously be mindful of unusual activity or paperwork. Below are several driver-based prevention strategies.

Driver Training. Educating drivers on security best practices is critical. Many carriers recommend training on situational awareness and reasonable suspicion, along with clear shipment-specific instructions. Policies mentioned include removing keys from unattended vehicles and using team drivers for high value loads to further deter theft. Instructing drivers to drive a certain distance (e.g., 200 miles) before stopping after a pickup (to avoid being followed from a facility by a would-be thief) was also mentioned as a means to minimize vulnerability.

Establish and Follow Parking and Trailer Drop Guidelines. Carriers emphasized strict protocols for where and how trailers are parked or dropped. These include:

- Park in well-lit locations that have security and monitoring;
  - Use only designated, overnight parking zones.
- Only drop trailers in a secure, fenced yard;
  - Do not drop trailers overnight.
- Do not unhook a trailer from a truck if it is not necessary; and
- Back trailers against walls/other trailers to limit trailer door access.

Company Processes and Policy-Based Strategies

Motor carriers typically do not have a single department focused on cargo theft, so recommendations were made on how to integrate cargo theft prevention across departments.

Internal Processes and Policy Controls. Carriers employ a range of internal policies and protocols designed to minimize risk and reinforce accountability, including:

- Conduct routine security audits and compliance reviews;
- Enforce regular password changes for information systems;
- Use publicly available tools (e.g. those from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration [FMCSA]) to vet customers and brokers;
- Conduct thorough driver vetting;
- Use due diligence with bills of lading (BOL):
  - Compare BOLs against rate confirmations;
  - If there are changes to the shipment details (e.g. new delivery address written on the BOL), take load confirmation steps such as requiring an updated BOL directly from the customer/shipper.

- Restrict access to insurance information and Certificates of Insurance (COI) and monitor MC number activity; and
- Cargo-based strategies such as avoiding high-value or theft-prone freight.

Equipment and Infrastructure

Physical Deterrents/Barriers to Theft. This strategy focuses on securing equipment and freight through physical means. Common vehicle tools include:

- Padlocks, disk detainer locks, and pin locks;
- Custom trailer door seal covers;
- Manual air brake knob locks; and
- Fencing, perimeter barriers, and locked containers, bolstered by lighting and surveillance systems such as closed-circuit television (CCTV) or onsite guards.

Facility Surveillance and Monitoring. Respondents reported a variety of technologies and practices used at facilities, including:

- Motion-sensitive CCTV;
- Gate alert systems and updates to gate codes help deter unauthorized access; and
- Perimeter patrols conducted by on-site guards.

Truck Tracking and Monitoring. GPS tracking, geofencing, and real-time monitoring systems help carriers maintain good visibility of assets. Redundant systems are often installed to ensure continuity if one fails or is defeated, and cameras (both in-cab and trailer-mounted) can both deter theft and offer footage after a theft has taken place.

LSPs: Cargo Theft Prevention Strategies

LSP theft prevention strategies focused mostly on who they do business with and how they communicate.

Carrier Vetting

The single most important tool used by brokers is thorough motor carrier vetting. Nearly all respondents discussed carrier vetting procedures that include:

- Initial vetting using software and online services;
- Continuous monitoring of vetted carriers; and
- Flagging of carriers that have been the victim of fraud.

Communications

The second most frequent strategy was how LSPs communicate with carriers, shippers and receivers. Strategies included:

- Validating contact information, especially phone numbers and email addresses;
  - Specifically scrutinizing email addresses and domains;
  - Calling phone numbers to verify legitimate customers;
- Communicating with all parties involved in a transaction – including carriers, shippers, receivers; and
- Using gut instinct and asking questions when something is suspicious.

Other Tools

Other tools listed by LSPs included parking requirements for carriers (do not leave trailers unattended; parking at secure locations only) and the vetting and training of employees.

Bottom Line: Cargo Theft Prevention Strategies

- *Motor Carriers: Train drivers in security best practices and establish rules for parking and dropping trailers.*
- *Motor Carriers: Establish internal processes and policies related to security throughout the company.*
- *Motor Carriers: Employ facility and truck monitoring.*
- *LSPs: Thoroughly vet motor carriers.*
- *LSPs: Use caution in all communications.*

Survey Results: Strengthening Partnerships with Law Enforcement

All respondents were asked about their experiences with reporting cargo theft to law enforcement. The Theft Group motor carriers were first asked what percent of their cargo theft incidents were report to law enforcement. The majority of respondents (82.2%) report all cargo theft to law enforcement. There was a small contingency of carriers (8.9%) that never reported cargo theft to law enforcement, but this group had a very small number of cargo theft incidents.

Theft Group LSPs were also asked about how often theft was reported to law enforcement. Slightly more than half (53.3%) reported all cargo theft to law enforcement, a significantly smaller number than motor carriers (Table 15).

Table 15: Percent of Incidents Reported to Law Enforcement*

Percent of Cargo Theft Incidents Reported to Law Enforcement	Percent of Motor Carriers	Percent of LSPs
100%	82.2%	53.3%
76-99%	0%	6.7%
26-75%	4.4%	26.7%
1-25%	4.4%	6.7%
0%	8.9%	6.7%

Finally, the Theft Group motor carriers were asked if there was a dollar-amount threshold policy within their company for reporting a theft. The majority, 87.5 percent, indicated that there was not a dollar threshold. Those who had a policy generally responded that thefts valued at less than $500 were not reported to law enforcement.

Carriers who had chosen not to report a theft in the past indicated that the low financial impact of the cargo theft and the cost-benefit of the reporting and investigation effort was not worth it as the cases were rarely resolved.

Finally, the Theft Group LSPs were asked if there was a dollar-amount threshold policy within their company for reporting a theft to law enforcement; the same percent of LSPs (87.5%) as motor carriers indicated that there was not a dollar threshold.

When LSPs did choose not to report to law enforcement, their reasons were similar to carriers. These included instances where 1) the cargo had little or no value, or 2) the effort was not deemed worth the administrative burden because working with law enforcement does not always lead to resolving the theft. Additionally, if the cargo was recovered prior to law enforcement involvement, it was not reported either.

Bottom Line: Strengthening Partnerships with Law Enforcement

- *While most respondents report all cargo theft incidents to law enforcement (82.2% of carriers and 53.3% of LSPs), some choose not to.*
  - *One reason is if the financial impact of the theft is low.*
  - *Citing low recovery numbers, some carriers are reluctant to invest time into reporting a theft to law enforcement.*

Survey Results: Insurance and Risk Management

Next, Theft Group motor carriers were asked about their experiences with cargo theft and their insurer. A plurality of respondents (31%) indicated that their insurance deductible for cargo theft was in the range of $10,000 - $49,999, with another 20 percent indicating deductibles in the

range of $5,000 to $9,999. Given that 69.9 percent of carriers reported an average value per theft of less than $50,000 (Figure 9), a significant share of theft incidents are below carriers' deductibles and thus uncovered by insurance.

Reporting Cargo Theft to an Insurer

Theft Group motor carriers were then asked if their company has a dollar amount threshold where cargo theft would or would not be reported to insurance. The majority of respondents (55.1%) indicated that they have no threshold. The remaining respondents had a threshold, with a plurality of respondents (40%) indicating $10,000 - $24,999.

Theft Group LSPs were also asked if there was a dollar threshold where cargo theft would or would not be reported to insurance. The majority of respondents (62.5%) indicated that they have no threshold. The remaining 37.5 percent indicated thresholds between $5,000 and $25,000.

Theft Group motor carriers were asked what percentage of incidents are reported to their insurer. A majority – 56.3 percent – reported all cargo theft incidents to their insurer. A much smaller percentage of LSPs (36.4%) report all their cargo theft incidents to their insurance carrier.

For both motor carriers and LSPs the percentage of respondents reporting all theft to insurance was much lower than those reporting to law enforcement (approximately 25.9 percentage points lower for motor carriers and to 16.9 percentage points lower for LSPs).

Likewise, more than a quarter of respondents in each category did not report any cargo theft incidents to insurance. This is a much higher instance of not reporting when compared to law enforcement reporting (22.4 percentage points higher for motor carriers and 20.6 percentage points higher for LSPs).

The Theft Group motor carriers were next asked why an incident would not be reported to insurance; the results are summarized below.

- *Below Deductible / Low Value.* Theft is not reported because it is under deductible or small financial impact.
- *Fear of Insurance Consequences.* Reporting discouraged due to concern over insurance cost or renewal.
- *Administrative Hassle.* Due to the administrative costs of reporting, some carriers will opt to avoid reporting.

The LSP Theft Group was next asked why an incident would not be reported to insurance; the results were very similar to motor carrier answers – with LSPs highlighting that low value/below deductible cargo was not reported, especially since it could have a negative impact on future insurance costs and coverage.

Finally, Theft Group motor carriers and LSPs were asked if they cap liability for cargo theft losses in customer contracts. For the motor carrier respondents, 68.0 percent had a liability cap. For LSPs, 81.2 percent indicated that they did have a cap on liability. For both, the cap typically varied by contract.

Insurance Industry Perspectives

A small convenience survey of nine insurance companies was also conducted as part of this analysis. The total number of policies reported by the respondents for the year 2023 was 19,779. The respondents were asked about the number of claims they received in 2023, and a claim frequency metric was calculated.

Of the total policies, there were 135 claims and claim frequency was calculated to be 0.7 percent. The average per-claim payment was $46,000, and the average maximum payment claim received by an insurer was $176,667.

Bottom Line: Insurance and Risk Management

- *A significantly larger percentage of respondents did not report cargo thefts to insurance (when compared to reporting rates to law enforcement).*
- *Reasons for not reporting included thefts value below deductible, fear of negative insurance consequences and administrative burdens.*
- *The majority of motor carriers (68.0%) and LSPs (81.2%) had a cap on cargo liability in their contracts.*
- *Cargo insurer claim frequency was found to be 0.07 percent.*

CARGO THEFT CASE STUDIES

To complement the broad snapshot offered by the cargo theft surveys, the research team developed case studies outlining three specific company experiences, responses and lessons learned from cargo theft. The case studies were developed through multiple discussions with the subjects as well as an analysis of provided data.

Company A Case Study – Large Freight Transportation and Logistics Provider

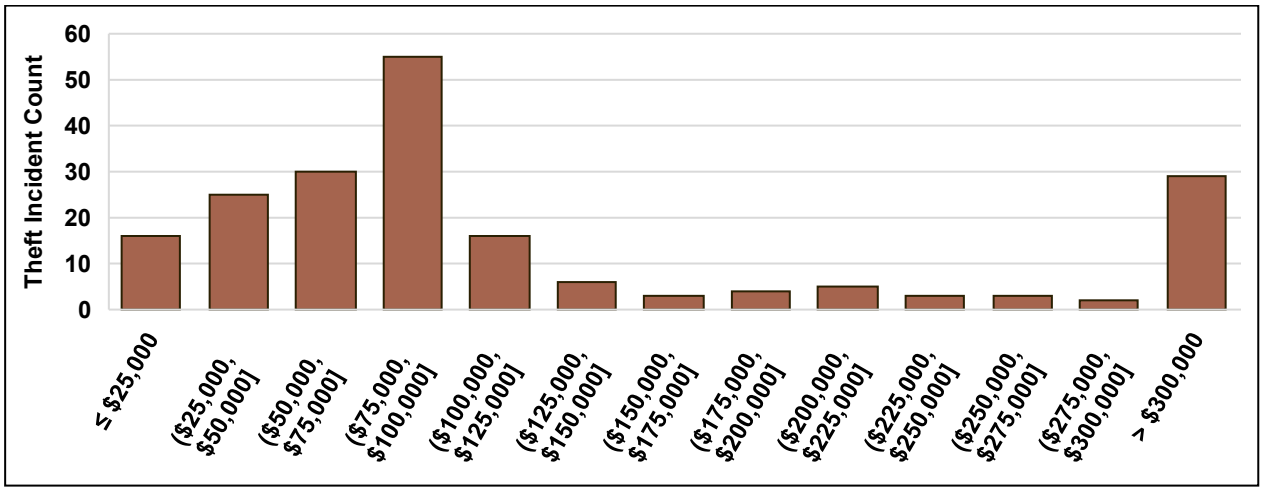
The first case study focuses on the cargo theft experiences of Company A, a large freight transportation and logistics provider in 2023. That year saw a significant number of theft incidents across Company A's operations, and particularly in the area of strategic theft.

Summary of 2023 Cargo Thefts

In 2023, a total of 201 *strategic* and *straight* cargo theft incidents were reported by Company A, with California accounting for 97 cargo theft incidents (48%).[47] The total value of the stolen cargo was $37.4 million. In 72 cargo theft incidents, the cargo was fully recovered ($6.7 million value). In six incidents, cargo was partially recovered ($2.1 million value), and in 123 incidents, the stolen cargo was not recovered ($28.7 million value). These thefts were across multiple business units (including units that could be categorized as motor carrier and logistics service provider) and instances of pilferage were not include in these totals.

The average value of cargo stolen per incident was more than $186,000, and the highest value theft totaled $1,520,000 (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Company A Cargo Theft Values



[47] Some calculations in this section are based on fewer than 201 theft events due to variations in data availability across different data points.

Theft of electronics had the most significant impact of all thefts in 2023 for Company A (Table 16). The majority (66.7%) of the financial losses attributable to cargo theft ($37.4 million) was due to electronics theft. Clearly, theft of this specific high-value-to-weight product was central to this company's cargo theft problems. The next most frequently stolen items were beverages and home goods, but the value of those goods paled in comparison to the electronics category.

Table 16: Company A – Overview of Stolen Goods*

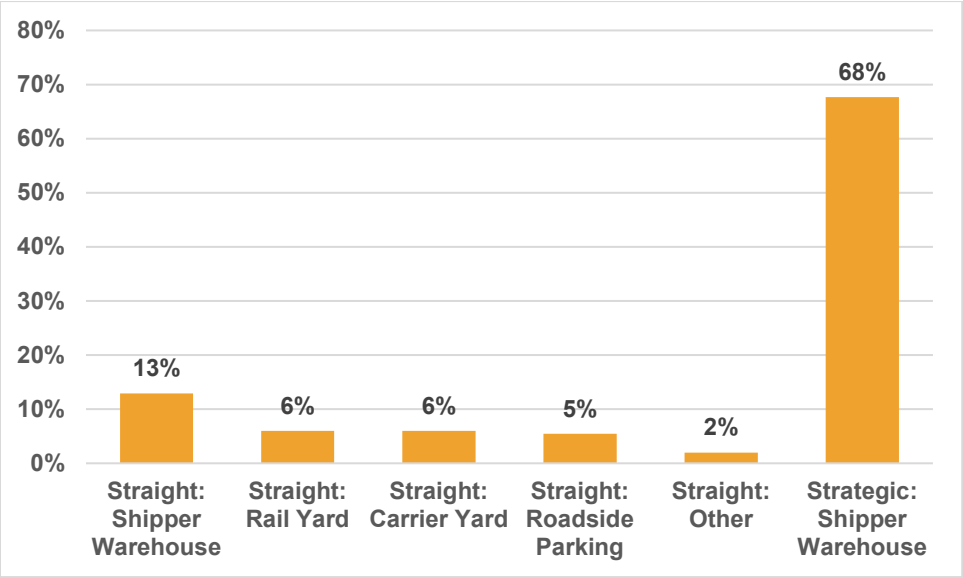
Product Type	Value of Goods Stolen	% of Cargo Theft Events	% of Commodity Stolen Recovered/Partially Recovered
Electronics	$24,939,577	27.4%	16.9%
Beverages	$2,538,307	16.9%	26.0%
Home Goods	$1,975,760	13.9%	10.4%
Retail Goods	$1,667,859	8.0%	6.5%
Metal / Building Products	$1,384,332	6.5%	6.5%
Tires	$1,354,381	7.5%	9.1%
Pharmaceutical and Medical	$922,525	3.5%	3.9%
Food	$801,264	5.5%	7.8%
Automotive	$670,905	4.5%	5.2%
Oil	$599,418	2.0%	3.9%
Other	$246,441	1.5%	0.0%
Batteries/Solar Panels	$216,000	1.5%	2.6%
Office Supplies	$121,500	1.5%	1.3%
Total	**$37,438,269**		

Theft Types and Locations

Straight and Strategic Theft

The majority of cargo theft incidents (68.0%) reported by this company were strategic thefts occurring at shipper warehouses, representing 80 percent of the total cargo value stolen. The remaining 32 percent of incidents were straight thefts at various locations (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Company A – Theft Method and Location



Criminal Activity on Load Boards

In response to increased strategic theft, Carrier A implemented a series of targeted countermeasures to address increasingly sophisticated criminal tactics. These included:

- Validating MC numbers by tracing transactions back to the original seller and, in some cases, obtaining sales contracts;
- Reevaluating traditional verification practices, recognizing that criminals now purchase aged MC numbers with accumulated miles to appear legitimate; and
- Modifying load board postings to omit specific commodity details, instead using generic descriptions to reduce exposure to targeted theft.

As a result of these changes, the fleet improved its ability to detect and flag suspicious carrier activity before load assignment and minimized the visibility of high-value shipments to external actors scanning load boards for theft opportunities.

Stolen Trucks and Trailers

The majority of cargo theft incidents (79%) did not involve equipment being stolen. However, there were instances where only the trailer (17.5%) or the tractor (0.5%) was stolen, as well as cases where both were stolen (3%).

In three theft cases involving stolen assets, physical violence was used against the driver or another individual involved; two resulted in the theft of a trailer, while the third involved the theft of both the tractor and trailer (parked at the driver's home). No incidents were reported in which weapons were used to steal the cargo.

Cargo Theft Reporting

Insurance Payouts for Lower Value Cargo Thefts

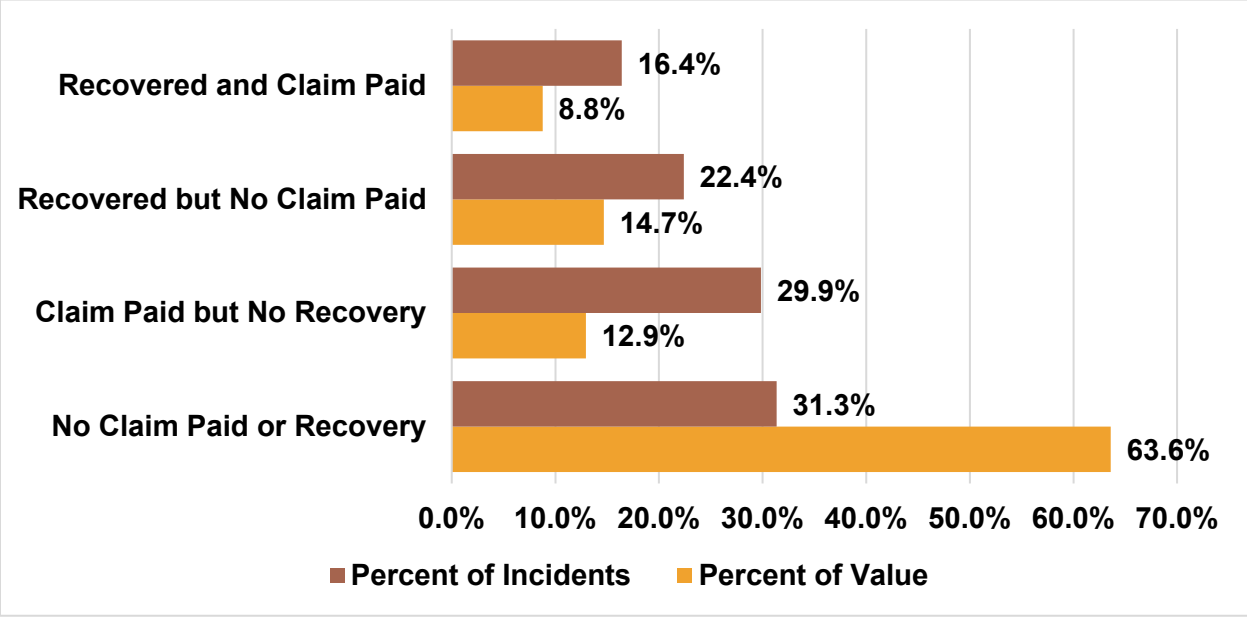
All 201 cargo theft incidents were reported to insurers, however, only 91 claims (45.27%) generated insurance payouts. Insurance payouts were most common for lower-value theft incidents. For Carrier A, insurers often approved smaller, simpler claims while higher-value cases faced stricter scrutiny (Table 17).

Table 17: Summary Table of Thefts by Insurance Claim Status*

Receive Insurance Claim Payout?	Sum of Cargo Value	Average Value per Theft	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Count
Yes	$8,126,518	$89,302	$1,700	$350,000	$62,927	91
No	$29,311,751	$276,526	$7,367	$1,521,493	$337,524	106

As shown in Figure 13, thefts that were neither recovered nor paid (full or partial) via insurance claims accounted for the majority of cargo thefts by value (64%) and a plurality of events (31%).

Figure 13: Thefts and Value Stolen by Claims Paid and Recovery*



Company B Case Study – 100-Truck Regional Carrier and Brokerage

Company B is a 100-truck Midwest-based transportation and logistics company with two divisions; one is an asset-based trucking operation, and the other is a logistics and brokerage unit. Company B's truck division has not experienced cargo theft. Two primary reasons for this are 1) Company B has direct control of the freight being moved (it is not contracted) and 2) the cargo carried by Company B – a specialized carrier – is not typically targeted by cargo thieves. The logistics and brokerage division has, however, experienced cargo thefts.

Cargo Theft Incident Example – Truckload of Premium Vodka Stolen

The company's brokerage division experienced a significant theft in 2024. A truckload of premium vodka was stolen and never recovered in what was likely a double-brokering scheme.

Theft Details

The brokerage contracted a motor carrier (MC 1) that it had worked with in the past to transport premium vodka. However, the shipment never reached its intended destination; instead, it was picked up by a driver (who was not involved in the crime) and delivered to a location in California, despite the BOL clearly listing another state as the final destination (Table 18).

Table 18: Series of Theft Events

The brokerage brokered the vodka load to MC 1 to be delivered to the upper Midwest. *Since the shipment never reached its intended destination, the brokerage received no payment.*	→	Unbeknownst to the brokerage, MC 1 re-brokered the load to MC 2, altering key load details such as changing the deliver to the west coast. *MC 1 — the fraudulent party — walked away with the vodka, likely reselling it for profit.*	→	A driver from MC 2 delivered the vodka to California instead of Minnesota without knowing that the correct destination had been changed. *MC 2 hauled the load and received payment unusually early from MC 1, raising suspicion that MC 2 may have been complicit. When carriers are not involved in fraud, they often receive no payment at all.*

The case study motor carrier believes the truck driver may have been misled by the MC 2 dispatcher and was likely unaware of the fraudulent nature of the delivery. Further complicating the situation, the BOL appeared to have been tampered with. The California warehouse used as the fraudulent delivery site was later linked to other criminal activity and has since ceased operations.

Response and Investigation

Given the nature of this theft, the trucking company was diligent in their reporting efforts. Local police departments, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, FMCSA, a county sheriff's department, Texas Department of Public Safety, and the California Highway Patrol all received reports of this theft. Apart from government agencies, the trucking company also reported the theft to CargoNet, Carrier411, and TIA Watchdog to alert other trucking companies to the bad actors involved. Following this theft, the trucking company engaged with the Midwest Cargo Theft Council to educate staff and partners on the threat that modern day cargo thieves pose.

Contributing Factors and Industry Implications

The incident exposed vulnerabilities in freight brokerage, load board security, and cargo tracking, underscoring the need for multi-agency coordination and stronger theft prevention measures.

Cargo thieves target high-value commodities like alcohol, electronics, and pharmaceuticals in regions with strong resale markets, often exploiting gaps in verification at shipping facilities, warehouses, and distribution centers to intercept loads before they reach their intended destinations.

There are three other factors that led to this theft:

- *Load board vulnerabilities.* Low-cost, low-barrier access to platforms makes it easy for bad actors to pose as legitimate carriers. Load boards offer free trials and/or inexpensive subscriptions, allowing easy access without significant financial commitment. The registration process sometimes requires minimal verification, enabling users to create accounts and view load details with little oversight or identity validation.
- *Double brokering and identify theft.* The use of forged documentation and false dispatch services disrupted the carrier chain of trust. As shown in Table 18, double brokering involves reassigning loads to unsuspecting third parties, often without the knowledge or consent of the original broker. Identity fraud occurs when a motor carrier's USDOT or MC number is unlawfully used by another entity to post as a legitimate operator.[48]
- *Several other red flags.* Early payment to the carrier, non-negotiated rates, inconsistent delivery location, and use of generic emails were all signals of suspicious activity.

Key Takeaways and Action Items for the Trucking Industry

This case study underscores four critical imperatives for the industry.

- *Transparency and collaboration are critical for tackling cargo theft.* Stakeholders might consider openly reporting and discussing incidents to improve trend analysis, prevention,

[48] FMCSA, "Broker and Carrier Fraud and Identify Theft" (April 7, 2025), https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/mission/help/broker-and-carrier-fraud-and-identity-theft#.

and policy advocacy. This goes beyond reporting to law enforcement and industry organizations (e.g., Carrier411 or CargoNet).

- *Front-line workers need stronger fraud and theft detection training.* Drivers and logistics personnel must be equipped to identify scams, verify documentation, and report suspicious activity.
- *Inconsistent reporting weakens theft response efforts.* Standardized protocols are essential for cross-agency coordination and better investigative outcomes.
- *Load board platforms should require stricter oversight.* Fraudsters exploit weak verification processes to impersonate carriers and reroute freight. More rigorous registration, verification, and real-time monitoring are necessary.

Company C Case Study – A Shipper's Perspective on Cargo Theft

Cargo theft across the entire supply chain presents a widespread challenge, impacting every mode and stakeholder in freight — from raw material procurement to final delivery to consumers. As instances of cargo theft continue to rise across the U.S., large-scale shippers with complex freight networks are reevaluating long-standing practices in areas such as carrier engagement, broker partnerships, and in-transit security. This case study leverages the insights of Company C, an international shipper with an annual freight spend exceeding $1 billion. While the specifics reflect one shipper's experience, the challenges and responses outlined below are broadly representative of what many shippers across the industry are facing today.
Company C oversees highly decentralized freight operations across more than 80 locations in the U.S. These include both corporate facilities and external co-manufacturing partners. While Company C generally does not operate its own fleet, they rely heavily on a large network of third-party carriers and brokers; approximately 60 percent of shipments move through brokers.

Targeted Freight and Theft Hotspots

The company's product portfolio includes a wide variety of easily resold consumer goods. Certain product types – particularly those packaged in glass or perceived as premium – are frequent targets due to their visibility in secondary markets such as liquor stores, bodegas, and small grocers.[49]

Geographic patterns in the shipper's theft incidents have emerged as well. California, and in particular the Inland Empire region, has become a persistent hotspot.[50] The area's concentration of cross-docks, warehouses and proximity to ports makes it ideal for thieves looking to intercept shipments and quickly divert them to warehouses or containers for international export.

[49] Overhaul, "Why is high-value cargo targeted for theft" (accessed August 4, 2025), https://over-haul.com/why-is-high-value-cargo-targeted-for-theft/.
[50] California Highway Patrol, "Cargo Theft Interdiction Program" (access August 4, 2025), https://www.chp.ca.gov/programs-services/programs/cargo-theft-interdiction-program2/.

Double-Brokering and Fraud Tactics

The most common method they observe involves fraudulent double-brokering. These schemes typically unfold as follows: a legitimate broker tenders a shipment to a vetted carrier. Bad actors, posing as the vetted carrier, accept the load and dispatch an unsuspecting driver – often someone unaware they are involved in a crime. That driver may receive alternate instructions mid-route, directing them to a different delivery location under false pretenses. By the time the deception is discovered, the freight has already been stolen.

In one recent case, a driver initially tasked with delivering freight from Texas to Georgia was redirected to California via text messages from a fake dispatcher. The driver sensed something was off and contacted the original broker, which ultimately helped thwart the theft.

Digital Access Points and Platform Risks

Load boards have become a common entry point for fraudulent actors, particularly on digital brokerage platforms. In several cases, criminals were able to impersonate authorized carriers and access load information through platforms that lacked multi-factor authentication (MFA). Since the implementation of MFA, incidents tied to these platforms have decreased considerably.

To mitigate risk, the shipper has adopted strict driver and equipment verification protocols, especially in high-theft areas. No shipment leaves certain locations without a full pre-clearance process that includes verifying:

- Commercial driver's license information;
- Tractor and trailer identification numbers;
- USDOT numbers; and/or
- Carrier name and contact details.

This approach has proven effective. In the year prior to implementation, the company experienced over 13 theft incidents; in the following year, with verification protocols in place, theft incidents were reduced to only four.

International Diversion and Sanctions Exposure

The value of the shipper's stolen freight is significant and varies by product. Standard shipments for this shipper are often worth $12,000 - $20,000 per trailer, while premium shipments could reach up to $60,000. Once stolen, shipments are often funneled to holding sites in Southern California, loaded into shipping containers, and sent abroad.

In some cases, stolen freight has been traced as far as Russia, despite ongoing U.S. trade sanctions and export restrictions implemented in response to the war in Ukraine.[51] Since 2022, the U.S. government has maintained sweeping economic and trade sanctions against Russia,

[51] International Trade Association, "Sanctions and Export Controls on Russia" (accessed August 14, 2025), https://www.trade.gov/russia-sanctions-and-export-controls.

which prohibit the export of goods across a wide range of categories, including consumer products; stolen cargo that makes it to Russia is obviously utilizing black markets and covert networks.

Emerging Risks: Rail Pilferage and In-Transit Vulnerabilities

Beyond full trailer thefts, this shipper has observed a rise in pilferage, particularly on rail shipments. In remote areas, trains have been deliberately stopped using physical obstructions (e.g., placing a vehicle on the tracks, cutting brake lines, and/or damaging the tracks), allowing thieves to access rail shipments two or three trains back while authorities are focused on the initial accident.

To enhance security measures on its rail and OTR shipments, the company is phasing out traditional plastic seals in favor of bolt seals, which are harder to tamper with. Additional monitoring is being implemented at high-risk staging areas, truck stops, and transfer points.

Implications for the Shipper Community

This case study highlights the need for enhanced vetting of carriers, the enforcement of robust identify checks, and active collaboration with enforcement agencies. For large shippers reliant on third-party freight networks, cargo theft is not a remote or isolated threat, it is an evolving risk that demands both strategic foresight and tactical response.

CONCLUSIONS

Scope of the Cargo Theft Problem

This cargo theft research utilized and synthesized the primary research conducted by ATRI with recognized external data sources from industry and government -- to assess the scale and complexity of cargo theft in the U.S. The key findings highlighted below confirm that cargo theft impacts on both the trucking industry and the U.S. economy are substantial.

The ATRI research team believes that these findings and recommendations, when understood and applied by all the key cargo theft stakeholders, substantially add to the national dialogue that is currently underway on strategies for reducing cargo theft.

How and Where Cargo Theft Occurs

- **65.3 percent** of motor carriers surveyed had experienced cargo theft in 2023 or prior
  - **43.2 percent** in the past year (2023)
- **100 percent** of LSPs surveyed had cargo stolen in 2023
- Motor carriers regularly fall victim to all kinds of theft, including pilferage **(39.9% of incidents)** straight theft **(31.5% of incidents)**, strategic thefts **(20.3% of incidents)**
- For LSPs, strategic theft was the greatest concern, representing **62.5% of incidents**
- **Food was the most frequently stolen category of cargo**, followed by electronics, automotive and beverages
- **California was at the top of the list** of states where thefts occur for motor carriers and LSPs; Illinois, Texas, Georgia, Florida and Tennessee rounded out the list of top states

The Financial Costs of Cargo Theft

- The average annual value of cargo stolen was:
  - **$521,135** for motor carriers
  - **$1,838,160** for LSPs
- The average loss per cargo theft Incident was:
  - **$29,108** for motor carriers
  - **$95,351** for LSPs
- Indirect cost multiplier
  - Indirect costs (e.g. delays, downtime) are estimated to be 3-6 times the direct costs (value of the cargo)
- Estimated annual direct and indirect costs of thefts from motor carriers:
  - Between **$1.83 billion** to **$6.56 billion**
- Estimated direct and indirect costs of thefts from motor carriers per day:
  - Nearly **$18 million**
- The majority of cargo stolen from motor carriers **(73.5%)** is never seen again

- While there are some partial recoveries, only **2 percent** of motor carrier cargo theft incidents are resolved with a full recovery of cargo

Reporting to Law Enforcement and Insurance

- A percentage of cargo theft incidents go unreported to law enforcement due to administrative burdens and expectations that cargo will not be recovered and criminals will not be caught
    - **82.2 percent** of motor carriers report all cargo theft incidents to law enforcement
    - **53.3 percent** of LSPs report all cargo theft incidents to law enforcement

- A percentage of cargo theft incidents go unreported to insurance due in part to concerns over insurance cost increases
    - **56.3 percent** of motor carriers report all cargo theft incidents to their insurer
    - **36.4 percent** of LSPs report all cargo theft incidents to their insurer

Three Strategies for Fighting Cargo Theft

Throughout this study, ATRI asked research participants what the greatest cargo theft-related challenges were, and what steps the industry should be taking to overcome those challenges. These comments and observations were combined with the statistical findings to develop the following action items for fighting cargo theft.

Foster “Security Culture” across the Supply Chain

Research participants strongly emphasized that numerous vulnerabilities and weaknesses exist at multiple points across the supply chain. This has made cargo theft easier for criminals , and more difficult for victims to detect and thwart. Research participants highlighted these issues as well as counter-strategies, as described below.

Vulnerabilities:

- There is a lack of truck driver cargo security training;
- Many employees or departments are not knowledgeable or focused on cargo security;
- Standard operating procedures and policies are missing or not aligned with the modern realities of cargo theft; and
- There is generally too much complacency within companies.

Approaches:

- Train drivers in theft prevention and situational awareness;
- Promote awareness and accountability to all staff;
- Provide support for driver vigilance (tools for verifying authenticity of documents and reporting suspicious activity); and
- Create a company-wide security mindset or "security culture" across the supply chain.

For most companies, cargo theft is not a daily occurrence. For many, security performance is difficult to measure – a company might simply not be aware of near misses/failed cargo theft attempts. When a cargo theft incident does occur, it is easy to measure, however, and the direct costs and associated consequences can be devastating.

Companies can counter complacency by establishing or strengthening their security culture. Similar to the safety culture concept, a strong security culture begins with the development of a deliberate and consistent set of rules and procedures focused on cargo theft prevention and reinforced with ongoing training.[52] A security culture would be shaped by those shared values and beliefs across a company that prevent theft, including:

- Leadership-driven support of and investment in security;
- The involvement of all employees in cargo theft awareness and security training;
- A clear set of policies, personnel expectations, and accountability; and
- The encouragement of all employees to report potential security issues proactively.

Within this security culture framework, implementing the prevention strategies identified by the industry and outlined in Section X of this report is critical. These strategies are detailed as Driver-Based (driver training and guidelines), Company Processes and Policies (internal rules to minimize risk), and Equipment and Infrastructure (physical barriers to theft and tracking/monitoring).

Enact Model State Legislation

Research participants throughout the research indicated that there is little interest within the judicial system for prosecuting cargo theft, and that current cargo theft penalties are insufficient. Additionally, participants suggested that law enforcement's capacity to combat cargo theft is often limited.

[52] Jeffrey Short, Linda Boyle, Sandra Shackelford, Bob Inderbitzen, and Gene Bergoffen, *The Role of Safety Culture in Preventing Commercial Motor Vehicle Crashes*, Commercial Truck and Bus Safety: Synthesis 14, Transportation Research Board of the National Academies (2007), https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/sites/fmcsa.dot.gov/files/docs/Commercial_Truck_and_Bus_Safety-The_Role_of_Safety_Culture.pdf.

Comprehensive anti-cargo theft tools can be developed, however, through state legislation. Such legislation can arm all stakeholders with enforcement resources and legal tools. This is particularly paramount for the top cargo theft states highlighted in this report.

The research team identified and analyzed legislation at the state-level that target cargo theft and worked with subject-matter experts to discern which legislative strategies had the highest likely efficacy. Model state legislation would include three action items:

1. *Designating Cargo Theft as a Distinct Crime.* For many states, it is important to designate cargo theft as a specific crime in order to differentiate cargo theft from general theft. State-level designations allow for targeted legal definitions that can be used by prosecutors (e.g. stealing from a vehicle/trailer engaged commercially in moving cargo).

2. *Graduated Sentencing for Cargo Theft.* Designating severity scales for sentencing guidelines is a second step to deter cargo thieves. This includes specific dollar value ranges that define the severity of a cargo theft as well as sentencing ranges (including minimum sentences) for stealing cargo at different value levels.

3. *State Task Force/Advisory Board.* A state designated advisory board or task force can formally bring key stakeholders together for information sharing, enforcement strategizing, and to develop public education programs – to provide greater focus towards the problem.

<u>Develop a Federal-Level Centralized Reporting Agency</u>

Almost all research participants confirmed that there is inadequate data-sharing across government agencies and between industry and government. Identified challenges include:

- Difficulty identifying appropriate agencies and processes for reporting fraud and cargo theft;
- Lack of coordination among agencies; and
- Need for better threat intelligence, tracking of trends, and dissemination of actionable information.

It was suggested throughout the research that a federal-level centralized cargo theft reporting agency or program is essential. Additionally, it is recognized that at the time of this report's publication there is federal bipartisan legislation being considered that would help coordinate the flow of cargo theft information across law enforcement. The key components and outputs of a central reporting agency are described below.

1. *Data Collection and Management.* A nationwide system for collecting accurate, timely cargo theft information from all levels of law enforcement and private sector stakeholders; and a system that manages and updates the collected data in a quickly accessible and secure database.

2. *Data Analysis.* Methods must be developed for continually analyzing these data to identify evolving trends, risk calculations, and cargo theft performance metrics.

3. *Cross-Jurisdictional Cargo Theft Information Sharing.* A method for automatically informing all relevant law enforcement jurisdictions in near-real time of cargo thefts.

4. *Dissemination of Intelligence.* This same program or agency could develop and distribute dashboards, guidelines, trends, patterns and hot spots in real time to all supply chain stakeholders.

There are many precedents that could assist in the design of such a program. One program framework is to create a Cargo Theft Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ISAC). ISACS have proven to be very effective in collecting and analyzing a range of relevant data, and distributing the analyses to targeted stakeholders associated with a specific industry or topic.[53] A cargo theft ISAC could be formed between federal agencies, freight industry stakeholders and law enforcement at multiple levels. In theory, the ISAC could be managed by a third-party under contract.

[53] Robert A. Norton and Marcus Sachs, "Cybersecurity and Food Defense: Establishing an ISAC for the Food and Agriculture Sector," Food Safety Magazine (April 10, 2023), https://www.food-safety.com/articles/8488-cybersecurity-and-food-defense-establishing-an-isac-for-the-food-and-agriculture-sector.

APPENDIX A: Motor Carrier Survey

The American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) is conducting research on the growing issue of cargo theft in the trucking industry. As motor carriers, shippers, insurers, and consumers increasingly encounter challenges related to theft, ATRI is working with industry stakeholders to better quantify cargo theft types, frequency, geography, and commodities targeted.

All collected data will be kept completely confidential. Personal, organizational, and/or financial information will never be released for public use under any circumstance. The final published report will only be presented in an aggregated, non-identifying format. As needed, ATRI will sign a confidentiality agreement.

The Cargo Theft Survey can be completed online here, OR by completing this form and returning it via email to jshort@trucking.org. Carriers with multiple operating fleets may submit data separately for each fleet. Please fill out two surveys if your motor carrier also has a brokerage.

Contact Information

1. Please enter your contact information below. Occasionally ATRI will follow up with participants to clarify answers. **Your information will be kept strictly confidential**. All participants will receive an advance copy of the full report.

Company	Contact Name (First and Last)
City, State	Position/Title
Phone Number	Email

2. Type of Business
   - ❑ For-Hire Motor Carrier
   - ❑ Private Fleet

If your fleet operates as a for-hire motor carrier and a broker, please complete two separate surveys, this first one for your motor carrier operations and click here for a pdf of the broker survey.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND WORKFORCE DATA

3. How many trucks does your company have?

4. What is your **primary** business operation type? *(Check only one)*

❑ Truckload Dry Van	❑ Less-Than-Truckload
❑ Refrigerated Van	❑ Tanker
❑ Flatbed	❑ Specialized – Oversize / Overweight
❑ Express / Parcel Services	❑ Intermodal Containers
❑ Automotive Transportation	❑ Household Goods Mover
❑ Other (please specify):	

5. What are the **three primary** types of commodities that your company hauls? (check up to three)

❑ Agricultural Products	❑ Industrial Gases
❑ Alcohol / Tobacco Products	❑ Intermodal Containers
❑ Automotive Parts	❑ Livestock
❑ Construction / Building Materials	❑ Manufactured Goods
❑ Electronics	❑ Mine Ores
❑ Finished Vehicles	❑ Modular / Mobile Homes
❑ Food Products - Refrigerated	❑ Non-Hazardous Chemicals
❑ Food Products – Non-Refrigerated	❑ Paper Products
❑ Forest Products / Wood	❑ Petroleum Products
❑ Garbage or Sanitation	❑ Pharmaceuticals
❑ General Freight	❑ Refrigerated Not-Food
❑ Hazardous Materials	❑ Retail Store / General Merchandise
❑ Heavy Machinery / Equipment	❑ Steel / Metal Sheets, Coils, Etc.
❑ Household Goods	❑ U.S. Mail / Parcel Service
❑ Other (Please Specify):	

CARGO THEFT TYPE AND FREQUENCY

For the purposes of this research, cargo theft is defined as an incident where cargo, and/or the equipment used to convey cargo, valued at $500 or more is stolen.

6. What was the most recent complete year in which your company experienced or was affected by cargo theft?

❍ 2023	❍ 2017
❍ 2022	❍ 2016
❍ 2021	❍ 2015
❍ 2020	❍ 2014
❍ 2019	❍ 2013
❍ 2018	❍ 2012
❍ My company has never experienced a cargo theft incident. (Skip to Q 17,18,28,29)	

Please note: In the remaining questions, please refer back to the year selected above.

7. How many total cargo theft incidents did your fleet experience for that year?

8. Is this an increase or decrease from the year prior?

❍ Increase
❍ No change
❍ Decrease

9. What was the total value of your stolen cargo for that year?

10. Please estimate the number of cargo theft incidents you experienced that year that fall into each of the following dollar amount categories.

$ Amount	Number of Cargo Theft Incidents
$500 - $1,000	
$1,001 - $10,000	
$10,001 - $50,000	
$50,001 - $100,000	
$100,001 or more	

11. What are the top states (up to five) in which you experience cargo theft incidents? Please list below.

State	Number of Cargo Theft Incidents

12. How many of your annual cargo theft incidents ($500 or more) fall into each of the following categories?

Theft Category	Description	# of Cargo Theft Incidents
Strategic	Planned and targeted theft of specific cargo, sometimes involving load boards, fleet / identity impersonation, double-brokering.	
Straight	An entire load of cargo is physically stolen from a location, often with a carrier's truck / trailer / equipment	
Pilferage	Selected cargo stolen from within a larger shipment (e.g., from a pallet or container in trailer)	
Other (Please Specify):		

13. Of your total cargo theft incidents:

How many involved a truck and / or trailer being stolen?

How many do you suspect / know were an "inside job"?

14. How many of your cargo theft incidents ($500 or more) happened at the following locations?

Location	# Total Theft Incidents
Customer Pick-up Location	
Customer Delivery Location	
Your Terminal	
Truckstop / Rest Area	
Other Overnight Parking Location	
Port / Intermodal Terminal	
Don't Know	
Other location (Please Specify):	

15. Please list in rank order your top cargo types (up to 10) most frequently stolen. *(e.g., liquor, TVs, produce)*

Rank	Cargo Type
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

16. Please estimate what percentage of your cargo was recovered from cargo theft incidents. *(value of cargo recovered divided by value of total cargo stolen)*

17. Do you know of any instances where your Motor Carrier (MC) number was used to steal cargo?

❍ Yes
❍ No

CARGO THEFT PREVENTION MEASURES

18. Please list, in rank order, the most effective strategies you have used to prevent cargo theft (provide up to 5 prevention strategies). If you have not identified a way to prevent cargo theft, please leave blank.

Rank	Cargo Type
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

CARGO THEFT REPORTING: LAW ENFORCEMENT

19. Thinking about the last year in which you experienced cargo theft, how many of your cargo theft incidents did you report to law enforcement?

20. What jurisdiction level of law enforcement have you worked with while investigating cargo theft? *(Select all that apply)*

❍ City
❍ County
❍ State Police / Patrol
❍ State Bureau of Investigation
❍ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
❍ Other (please specify:

21. Is there a dollar amount threshold where you report cargo theft to law enforcement?

❍ Yes
❍ No
If you answered yes, please specify:

22. What are your top reasons for not reporting cargo theft to law enforcement?

#	Reason
1	
2	
3	

CARGO THEFT REPORTING: INSURANCE

23. What is your insurance deductible for cargo theft?

❍ Don't know
❍ If known, select here and specify $ amount:

24. Is there a dollar amount threshold where you report cargo theft to your insurance carrier?

❍ Yes
❍ No
If you answered yes, please specify $ amount:

25. Thinking about the last year in which you experienced cargo theft, how many of your cargo theft incidents did you submit to your insurance carrier?

26. What are your top reasons for not reporting cargo theft to your insurance carrier?

#	Reason
1	
2	
3	

27. Do you cap liability for cargo losses in customer contracts?

❍ We do, it varies between contracts
❍ We do not
❍ Don't know
❍ We do, it is capped at (please specify $ amount):

Final Comments

28. What do you consider to be the most significant challenge(s) related to cargo theft? *(provide up to three challenges)*

29. What do you believe the trucking industry should be doing to address cargo theft? *(provide up to three recommendations)*

ATRI is looking for more detailed cargo theft incident data for this research. This data will be essential to quantify the frequency, severity and location of cargo theft incidents across the U.S.

The data being requested focuses on specific incident details – location, cargo value and quantity, recovery status, etc. Data will be confidential and reported in an aggregated format.

30. Are you willing to support this expanded data collection by providing a list of cargo theft incidents from the most recent year that you experienced cargo theft?

❍ Yes ❍ No

If you answered yes to this question, please provide email in box below if not provided at the beginning of this survey and the ATRI team will contact you.

Thank you! We greatly appreciate your support for this critical research. For questions or additional information, contact Jeff Short: Email: jshort@trucking.org Phone: 770-432-0638

APPENDIX B: Broker Survey

The American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) is conducting research on the growing issue of cargo theft in the trucking industry. As motor carriers, shippers, insurers, and consumers increasingly encounter challenges related to theft, ATRI is working with industry stakeholders to better quantify cargo theft types, frequency, geography, and commodities targeted.

All collected data will be kept completely confidential. Personal, organizational, and/or financial information will never be released for public use under any circumstance. The final published report will only be presented in an aggregated, non-identifying format. As needed, ATRI will sign a confidentiality agreement.

The Cargo Theft Survey can be completed online here, OR by completing this form and returning it via email to jshort@trucking.org. Carriers with multiple operating fleets may submit data separately for each fleet. Please fill out two surveys if your motor carrier also has a brokerage.

Contact Information

1. Please enter your contact information below. Occasionally ATRI will follow up with participants to clarify answers. **Your information will be kept strictly confidential**. All participants will receive an advance copy of the full report.

Company	Contact Name (First and Last)
City, State	Position/Title
Phone Number	Email

2. Type of business.
   ❍ Broker

This data collection form is for brokers ONLY. If you're a motor carrier click here to download the pdf of the motor carrier form.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND WORKFORCE DATA

3. What services are offered through your brokerage? (check all that apply)

❑ Truckload Dry Van	❑ Less-Than-Truckload
❑ Refrigerated Van	❑ Tanker
❑ Flatbed	❑ Specialized – Oversize / Overweight
❑ Express / Parcel Services	❑ Intermodal Containers
❑ Automotive Transportation	❑ Household Goods Mover
❑ Other (please specify):	

4. How many contracts did your brokerage sign in 2023?

CARGO THEFT TYPE AND FREQUENCY

For the purposes of this research, cargo theft is defined as an incident where cargo, and/or the equipment used to convey cargo, valued at $500 or more is stolen.

5. What was the most recent complete year in which your company experienced or was affected by cargo theft?

❍ 2023	❍ 2017
❍ 2022	❍ 2016
❍ 2021	❍ 2015
❍ 2020	❍ 2014
❍ 2019	❍ 2013
❍ 2018	❍ 2012
❍ My company has never experienced a cargo theft.	

Please note: In the remaining questions, please refer back to the year selected above.

6. How many cargo total theft incidents impacted your brokerage that year?

7. Is this an increase or decrease from the year prior?

❍ Increase
❍ No change
❍ Decrease

8. What was the total value of your stolen cargo for that year?

9. Please estimate the number of cargo theft incidents you experienced that year that fall into each of the following dollar amount categories.

$ Amount	Number of Cargo Theft Incidents
$500 - $1,000	
$1,001 - $10,000	
$10,001 - $50,000	
$50,001 - $100,000	
$100,001 or more	

10. What are the top states (up to five) in which your contracted fleets experience cargo theft incidents? Please list below.

State	Number of Cargo Theft Incidents

11. How many of your annual cargo theft incidents ($500 or more) fall into each of the following categories?

Theft Category	Description	# of Cargo Theft Incidents
Strategic	Planned and targeted theft of specific cargo, sometimes involving load boards, fleet / identity impersonation, double-brokering	
Straight	An entire load of cargo is physically stolen from a location, often with a carrier's truck / trailer / equipment	
Pilferage	Selected cargo stolen from within a larger shipment (e.g., from a pallet or container in trailer)	
Other (Please Specify):		

12. Of your total cargo theft incidents that year:

How many involved a truck and / or trailer being stolen?

How many do you suspect / know were an "inside job"?

13. How many of your cargo theft incidents ($500 or more) happened at the following locations?

Location	# Total Theft Incidents
Customer Pick-up Location	
Customer Delivery Location	
Your Terminal	
Truckstop / Rest Area	
Other Overnight Parking Location	
Port / Intermodal Terminal	
Don't Know	
Other location (Please Specify):	

14. Please list in rank order your top cargo types (up to 10) most frequently stolen. *(e.g., liquor, TVs, produce)*

Rank	Cargo Type
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

15. Please estimate what percentage of your cargo was recovered from cargo theft incidents. *(value of cargo recovered divided by value of total cargo stolen)*

CARGO THEFT PREVENTION MEASURES

16. Please list, in rank order, the most effective strategies you have used to prevent cargo theft (provide up to 5 prevention strategies). If you have not identified a way to prevent cargo theft, please leave blank.

Rank	Cargo Type
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

CARGO THEFT REPORTING: LAW ENFORCEMENT

17. Thinking about the last year you experienced cargo theft, how many of your cargo theft incidents did you report to law enforcement?

18. What jurisdiction level of law enforcement have you worked with while investigating cargo theft? (Select all that apply)

❑ City
❑ County
❑ State Police / Patrol
❑ State Bureau of Investigation
❑ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
❑ Other (please specify: ❑

19. Is there a dollar amount threshold where you report cargo theft to law enforcement?

❍ Yes
❍ No
If you answered yes, please specify dollar amount:

20. What are your top reasons for **not** reporting cargo theft to law enforcement?

#	Reason
1	
2	
3	

CARGO THEFT REPORTING: INSURANCE

21. Is there a dollar amount threshold where you report cargo theft to your insurance carrier?

❍ Yes
❍ No
If you answered yes, please specify dollar amount:

22. Thinking about the last year in which you experienced cargo theft, how many of your cargo theft incidents did you submit to your insurance carrier?

23. What are your top reasons for not reporting cargo theft to your insurance carrier?

#	Reason
1	
2	
3	

24. Do you cap liability for cargo losses in customer contracts?

❍ We do, it varies between contracts
❍ We do not
❍ Don't know
❍ We do, it is capped at (please specify dollar amount):

Final Comments

25. What do you consider to be the most significant challenge(s) related to cargo theft? *(provide up to three challenges)*

26. What do you believe the trucking industry should be doing to address cargo theft? *(provide up to three recommendations)*

ATRI is looking for more detailed cargo theft incident data for this research. This data will be essential to quantify the frequency, severity and location of cargo theft incidents across the U.S.

The data being requested focuses on specific incident details – location, cargo value and quantity, recovery status, etc. Data will be confidential and reported in an aggregated format.

27. Are you willing to support this expanded data collection by providing a list of cargo theft incidents from the most recent year that you experienced cargo theft?

❑ Yes ❑ No

If you answered yes to this question, please provide email in box below if not provided at the beginning of this survey and the ATRI team will contact you.

Thank you! We greatly appreciate your support for this critical research.

For questions or additional information, contact Jeff Short:
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