

Reducing air freight theft

The AFP's new program to counter freight theft is succeeding in overcoming jurisdictional problems that have plagued police and the aviation industry for decades.

Reduce Air Freight Theft (RAFT) has been piloted in Western Australia by the AFP's Perth Airport office. The program aims to reduce loss and theft of freight, enhance freight security and employee integrity, and to identify criminal activity, trends and methodology.

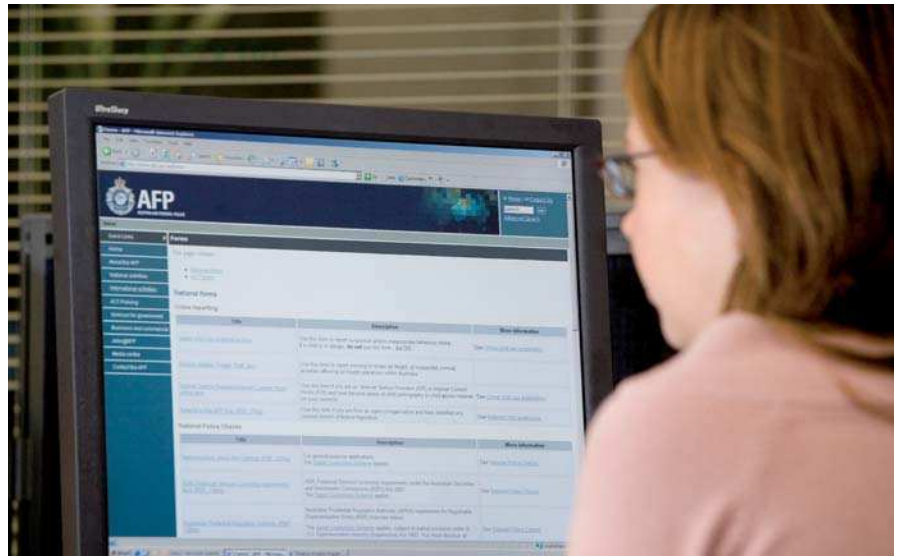
Traditionally, companies have not reported their losses at all, or they have done so in an uncoordinated way, because of the difficulty identifying where the theft or loss actually occurred.

Detective Sergeants Tony Wilson and Gary Butler have had a leading role in the pilot as members of the AFP's joint aviation investigations team at Perth Airport.

"For some time the industry was not clear about who they should be reporting freight loss to," Detective Sergeant Wilson said. "Police need to know where the goods were lost, but often freight companies don't know if they were lost at the point of origin, one of the transit points or at the final destination."

"We consulted with the freight industry when we were developing the program and were told they wanted a national approach with a simple line of reporting."

The AFP's joint aviation investigation teams based at Australia's major international airports are involved



in investigating organised crime in the aviation sector and include representatives from the AFP, Customs and local police.

"The inter-agency approach for the AFP's joint aviation investigation teams is perfectly suited to an aviation freight theft program because it means we can provide a coordinated and streamlined approach to freight theft," Detective Sergeant Wilson said.

The AFP's RAFT program is based on Queensland Police Service's program of a similar name, which was aimed at reducing all freight theft including road, air, rail and sea.

Queensland Police began its program in 1999 following a successful air freight theft investigation.

"The intelligence we gathered during the investigation indicated a broader

problem, up to the point where offenders were discussing stealing freight to order," Detective Senior Sergeant Lance Vercoe said. "As a result, a program was launched to provide a dedicated response to freight theft in Queensland."

In February this year, Detective Senior Sergeant Lance Vercoe introduced the RAFT concept to AFP Aviation. Airport Police Commander Mal Scott took the opportunity to pilot the concept in Perth and asked Detective Vercoe to assist the Perth joint aviation investigation team in developing the program.

"We recognised that the success of the program depended heavily on our close working relationships with our partners in the aviation industry," Commander Scott said. "The set-up of the joint aviation investigation teams means the AFP, WA Police and Customs can immediately

Left: The AFP has an online form to report freight theft.



work on a coordinated response.

“But we were very aware that we also needed to engage with the aviation freight industry if the program was to be a success.”

Australian Air Express (AAE) is a key stakeholder in the AFP’s RAFT program and had been involved in the Queensland Police program.

“Over a number of years, we had some success with the Queensland program, but it was not available in other states,” AAE’s General Manager Security Paul Cullis said. “Cross-border issues in terms of reporting missing freight meant we could not be sure reports would be investigated.”

Mr Cullis said the company was very interested when they first heard of the AFP’s aviation freight theft program. As

specialists in air freight forwarding, AAE want their customers to have confidence in the security of their goods during transport, otherwise they will use different freight forwarding options, such as road or rail.

“The AFP’s RAFT program highlights that there is a need for greater levels of security and control of freight movements,” Mr Cullis said. “The message to the small percentage of people who might consider theft is: you will be caught. Since June this year there have been a number of arrests. We’ve had very positive results. It’s been fantastic.”

The timely reporting of loss is critical to the AFP’s ability to get these positive results and Commander Scott has encouraged freight companies to use the AFP’s online report form.

“This is a centralised reporting process

that gives freight companies peace of mind that their concern will be investigated and it allows the AFP and our aviation partners to tackle the bigger issues of aviation freight theft,” Commander Scott said.

The success of the trial in Perth and the interest and support of the aviation industry has led to the AFP’s RAFT program being developed into a national program.

Members of the AFP’s joint investigation teams from around Australia met in Perth in October to prepare for the progressive rollout of RAFT to Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide.

To find out more about the RAFT program please contact AFP Aviation on 131 AFP.

Companies can access the Reduce Aviation Freight Theft at:

www.afp.gov.au/forms