

# Prefab Structures Help Costco Secure Gas Station Equipment



Costco operates 240 gas stations throughout North America today. Early on in the design phase of these gas stations, engineers realized that to protect the equipment necessary for operations they would need structures both to secure and house sensitive equipment and also to provide climate control. They discovered prefab equipment shelters were the most reliable and cost-effective option for their needs.

In an interview with Tim Hurlocker, Director of Gasoline Operations at Costco, Hurlocker offered the following when asked why they chose prefab structures over stick built: “The equipment shelters are durable and easy. We order them, they arrive and we just plop them down on a concrete pad. It’s much cheaper to buy prefab than to try to build them ourselves.”

Asked why these shelters are necessary to their operations, Hurlocker explained, “The original objective for the equipment shelters was two-fold: Guard the equipment and control the temperature around the equipment. We operate gas stations from Anchorage to Miami and from Hawaii to Minnesota. Though the outside may be very cold or very hot, we have to maintain a climate around all the gas station control equipment within a specific range.” Hurlocker continued, “As evidenced by the twelve years that we’ve been working together, the equipment shelters from California-based B.I.G. Enterprises continue to meet our expectations and serve our purposes very well.”

The shelters also serve a functional role for the gas stations’ security needs. Hurlocker continued, “We have to secure equipment away from those who would seek to tamper with it. Unlike most gas stations, at Costco, the equipment shelter is not an attendant workstation. It is unmanned—this is an important point. It houses supplies, but no people and no chairs.”

“For increased security, we are now buying equipment shelters with a hotel style door with auto locking. One doesn’t want anyone sneaking in there.



Costco Wholesale Booth

The shelters contain a lot of control equipment—for the casual thief, there is nothing that they could resell, but we have to keep the casual thief out because they think they might be able to sell something. For this reason, in tougher areas, we have had a number of locations with wire mesh reinforced windows,” said Hurlocker.

When asked what standard design feature was critical in terms of functionality, Hurlocker said, “Painting is difficult and B.I.G. has it dialed in.”

The new paint system provides a catalyzed two-component polyurethane topcoat paint that serves as a protective feature by resisting chemical, impact, fade,

abrasion and UV exposure. Recently tested by an independent 3rd party for rust and corrosion under extreme simulated weather conditions, the paint system showed no signs of rusting, no undercut creeping and no corrosion at the scribe cut in the steel after 3,500 hours of laboratory tests. No other manufacturer of equipment shelters has this paint system.

For other security or facility planners in retail and commercial environments looking to utilize prefab structures, Hurlocker made the following suggestions:

**One:** Use self-locking doors. “It’s human nature, people will prop them open and then you defeat your security. Plus, when they’re propped open, they waste a whole lot of air conditioning and heating. Also, someone could slip in and place some sort of device inside (tracking or other) that your employee doesn’t detect.”

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**Two:** Windows are a good idea for a hut that isn't a manned station. "This may seem counterintuitive, but when your employees enter these unmanned structures, they are blind to what's going on around them. The most valuable thing you've got working for you is the eyes and judgment of your people. Without windows, suddenly they are inside a dark cubicle. I would trade people seeing-in VS my people seeing-out anytime. If people can see in and see that there is nothing of value, you'll lower break-ins. Because equipment shelters frequently lack windows, break-ins occur more often because thieves think the structures must be protecting something valuable that they can sell."

**Three:** Secure your air conditioning opening. "Most equipment shelters have A/C units to condition the electric equipment. If someone can kick your A/C through the opening, the opening is big enough to crawl through. A bracket, or something that secures your A/C in the hole, is desirable."



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