Stories about theft and vandalism on golf courses abound. The problems vary according to the location of the course and its surrounds. Remote rural courses with few roads or footpaths within their bounds can expect few problems, nevertheless unless they are prepared they can expect a visit from the professional thief taking advantage of their quiet location to relieve them of equipment - kit which will probably be specially selected for its ability to be passed on readily - it is even suggested that some items may be selected because someone has asked for specific items. In other words equipment is stolen to order. In contrast the picture in urban areas is of a considerable amount of petty theft and vandalism - and a greater amount of disruption. Speaking to several clubs it is obvious that vandalism is considered a far worse problem, partly because it is on-going and needs constant vigilance and remedial action. Theft of equipment is usually covered by insurance although there may be restrictions and an excess - which may increase with each instance of theft. There seems to be a very fatalistic view on this with many clubs taking few precautions to protect their possessions. Conventionally sheds with corrugated asbestos or fibre cement sides and roofs are simple to break, and bolt croppers or a bar will remove most door locks or hinges. Common sense or help from the local police crime prevention officer may suggest a number of simple precautions which will add to security, and often these are remarkably inexpensive. But it is not only plant and equipment which goes missing, sand, fertilisers and chemicals are also known to "walk" and turf to be stripped or trees...
Theft is a growth industry at golf clubs but Hugh Tilley investigates the best ways to reduce the chances of it happening to you...

removed under cover of darkness.
Vandalism is very disruptive to the daily routine, and a number of clubs have instituted dawn patrols with the greenkeepers checking every green and tee to ensure that all markers, flags and other course furniture is in place before members arrive. Nor need this petty vandalism be confined to misplaced these items, more serious damage may be occasioned by cars driven over the greens and down the fairways.

Footpaths across a course are a known danger point, however, they may not be such a problem if they are purely footpaths with no bike or vehicular access. In addition, walking dogs may be a potential disruption to golf, but they also offer unpaid security. It may be possible to ensure that vehicular access is prohibited by cementing in posts or putting up gates.

Researching this feature led to contacting a number of clubs - normally the Secretary as the person most involved in club security. This straw poll produced a range of responses from the more secluded clubs which have "no problem" - one secretary qualified this reply - "unless you leave your clubs unattended outside the clubhouse - we have occasional opportunists," to the inner city clubs which has regular security guard patrols around the car park during the day and around the course at night. This club which is highly security conscious, has digital locks on every external door and is in the process of fencing - with close board fencing - some mile of road exposed perimeter. Needless to say this club also has CCTV. Floodlights activated by sensors or better still, dual technology sensors makes for additional security as well as making life easier for those who are entitled to be there. Dummy alarm boxes and CCTV cameras are a cheap first stage protection. A major problem with many alarm systems on greenkeepers' sheds is that there must be a response - or the likelihood of a response. With many such facilities situated away from habitation and the club house this can be a problem, and a flashing light or siren may not be heard - so many clubs take trouble to hide the sheds. However, there are other options such as radio or cable links to a monitoring point. To be realistic it has to be asked, who will respond? - and will they arrive within about ten minutes of the alarm being triggered. The professional thief anticipates that sort of time within which to complete his task un-molested, and expects to have left the scene within that time.

Secure buildings or compartments can provide a safe home for smaller tools, particularly those such as strimmers, chainsaws and small mowers. Workshop tools like electric drills and grinders are also saleable, so are spanners and many other items so they need a lockable store. Ex-shipping containers provide ideal lockable stores, however, they are not very pretty - but they can be decorated or screened. Purpose made sheds are also available which look better or more aesthetically with which to prevent access. Many locks are available with multiple keys, it is also easy to extra keys cut, while some situations allow digital locks or combination locks to be used. The more sophisticated digital locks and barriers will allow for easy changing of the number and for more than one code.

Growing use is being made of CCTV - closed circuit television - and again a dummy camera offers a cheap deterrent. The real thing needs to be carefully positioned and specified to give sufficient resolution for identification. Any reputable supplier of security equipment should be able to advise.

Manufacturers of tractors and ride-on mowers have also taken up the challenge and most modern equipment is in greater measure vandal and petty theft resistant, by such simple expedients as enclosing oil and fuel filler points with in lockable panels. Putting sand into engine or hydraulics is common form of vandalising - but one which can have expensive consequences.

While this feature has considered security in terms of theft and vandalism, perhaps head greenkeepers and course managers need also to consider the club's responsibility for health and security as this may require security for reservoirs, ponds and other types of risk. Nor is the fact that someone has no legal right to be there a sufficient defence. Fencing and notices stating 'deep water' or similar hazard are simple means of protecting the club against later claims.

Yellow pages will yield a number of contacts for all types of assistance with security, from personnel to equipment. The best recognised qualification for installers for security systems is NACOSS - the National Approved Council for Security Systems but perhaps the better qualification is local experience and word of mouth - and an off the record recommendation from the local crime prevention officer is also useful.

To be in the modern idiom, perhaps most golf clubs need to undertake a 'security audit' and to review their arrangements on a regular basis - and to consider all aspects, course, buildings and any other risk.