

THE NEED TO BE

SECURITY CONSCIOUS

Hugh Tilley offers some useful advice on ways of making your maintenance facility and equipment more secure

Theft and vandalism are now a major problem for many golf clubs and while once it was the clubhouse which was the target it has now extended and on some courses it has become impossible for greenkeepers to leave anything out even while they have lunch.

For many the first routine in the morning is to check round to make sure that flags and markers are in position – or that nothing has been dumped. A number of clubs have taken quite radical action to secure their equipment and make everything as vandal-proof as is reasonably possible. This has meant investing in lock-ups, security equipment, lighting and alarms. Small powertools such as brushcutters and workshop equipment are particularly 'nickable' because they are relatively easy to sell, however there has been an increase in the number of larger items such as mowers (including triples) and tractors which have gone missing, and it is assumed that these are stolen to order.

Investing in security may help keep insurance costs down, may be a requirement of continuing cover, or may even allow premiums to be reduced, but in any event it must be worthwhile if only to avoid all the hassle. A few courses, such as St Enodoc in Cornwall (see Page 19), have resorted to employing security guards. Whether such a measure will succeed in other places is a moot point because of the extensive nature of most golf courses and the fact that the presence of a guard may even be an incentive for some to play 'catch me.'

Most vandalism is more annoy-

ing than costly, moved flags, markers thrown around, however damage such as setting fire to sheds or using the greens and fairways as a race track or skidpan is more serious and can render parts of the course temporarily unplayable. One club which has fared particularly badly in the past is Swinton Park Golf Club in Greater Manchester. Their chapter of major incidents includes having the greenkeepers' shed burnt down with a total loss of equipment, having a stolen Range Rover smash through the gates and badly damage several greens, tees and fairways and having a stolen car fired on a green. The loss of flags and rakes is virtually an everyday occurrence.

Another club with by comparison a considerably less severe problem is Queens Park, Bournemouth. Its problem lies in the fact that it is a public open space, accessible to the malevolent and wicked – as well as to many walkers of dogs. Queens Park were particularly worried by vandalising of their previous hose based irrigation system. Being on free draining heathland, irrigation is vital to the course. As a result, in specifying an all new system they insisted that all sprinklers are of the pop-up type. The Toro 644 units proved to be unintrusive to the point that they often need to be switched on to locate them – and they are certainly impossible to pull up without using a spade. Control boxes local to each green and tee are housed in steel boxes under a substantial cover, and while these can be opened and tampered with, when visited last spring there had been no problems, and this was attributed to the fact that electric wires and contacts are very evident. People, including potential vandals, are frightened by electricity. Queens Park pro-

ected the pump and controls inside a substantial concrete block building within the greenkeepers' compound which has a 2.5m high fence around it. The reservoir is also in the compound and roofed to prevent sticks, cones or stones being thrown into it.

For Swinton Park this level of protection is nothing like sufficient. When they had their shed burnt down with the loss of all their equipment they commissioned a local builder to build an impenetrable building. The resul-

tant 600m² 'shed' has 220mm solid concrete block walls, a 150mm thick concrete roof and no windows – just two steel doors further protected by a lockable steel barrier to prevent ramming. The concrete roof protects an area which is often left vulnerable on many standard buildings which are otherwise secure, while the substantial steel bar in front of the doors pre-empts ramming which often jams steel doors even if it doesn't effect entry. Windows were felt to be areas of great vulnerability – hence their

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omission. Swinton has gone further than this and has a full intruder alarm system linked direct to the police.

With the vulnerability of all equipment the start for all security must be consideration of fencing the greenkeepers sheds. A good lockable compound will deter casual vandals, locks bought with multiple keys allow authorised access. An electric fence – as used to contain livestock – is also a useful deterrent, but will need regular maintenance and very visible public warning.

The buildings themselves need to be secure, those 'sheds' normally found on the golf course offer little resistance to the thief. Doors and windows are obvious vulnerable points but reinforcing them may not be worthwhile if walls and roof are only timber or corrugated steel and asbestos. As a result the more effective answer

may be to build or buy a secure building or container and leave the shed unlocked – then no damage is done trying to get in. Many golf clubs have bought old shipping containers and use these for their vulnerable equipment. The problems with shipping containers are that firstly they are unsightly, secondly they are not spacious enough to put tractors and larger mowers in, and thirdly they are liable to be highly corroded, or even full of holes. Purpose made secure storage is

available from a number of companies such as Groundhog, nor is it excessively expensive. This company has recently introduced a half round timber cladding to the range and added a pitched tiled roof which makes the unit visually acceptable, although this adds significantly to the cost because each timber is screwed to the steel shell. Smaller containers may also be useful around the course for temporary tool storage, while lockable boxes to fit pick-up truck, tractor linkage or turf maintenance vehicle may ensure the safety of small hand tools, chemicals and other items which may 'walk' when a greenkeeper's back is turned.

Tractor trailers are not usually at risk, however smaller trailers such as those designed for ATVs and road use are, so too are major items such as mini excavators and similar plant. These can be protected by diverse means, the simplest with trailers being either a wheel clamp or locking the hitch. A better method however is to concrete in a hitching post and lock to this. Tractors are at risk to joy riders even if they haven't the glamour of an XR2. Tractors deserve a little more immobilising than just locking and removing the key – many car immobilisers work. In bad areas if the tractor is not actually removed it will lose 'bits' or have dirt put in the fuel – perhaps in spite because it can't be driven. Batteries are saleable.

Lighting can provide one of the most useful deterrents providing there are likely to be people around to spot a potential intruder or vandal, – there is no point in illuminating buildings just for their benefit! PIR – or passive infra-red, or better, dual technology systems, which automatically switch lights on is particularly effective because it alerts

people, however it can be prone to false alarms and failures if bought cheap and not carefully sited and set-up. Is it realistic to expect a £20 domestic PIR light from a DIY shop to protect £100,000 of equipment? It may be more effective to erect the lights on a tall standard so that it can be seen at greater distances, such lights are also useful to light the area for working in winter.

Of course such lighting is useless for security when the buildings are hidden or remote, as are audible alarms, however PIR and other more sophisticated forms of intruder detection are available to link by radio to a remote alarm in the clubhouse or even to page someone. Proprietary systems can be linked to a private security company, to the head greenkeeper or to the police, however because of the inevitable delay from alarm to response most are of limited use to a golf club. Video surveillance and recording seems to be proving remarkably effective in many places.

The crime prevention officer of the local police is one useful and free source of advice. Also there are a growing number of specialist security equipment suppliers happy to give advice, but don't expect it to be unbiased, after all they are after a sale. Some insurance companies also have advice to give, although this may be negative, perhaps suggesting that items at risk won't be covered if not secured or protected, or only at a higher premium or excess.

The police recommend making equipment identifiable. One idea may be to paint mowers and greens equipment in day-glo colours – they would help the player to see them while making them less valuable to acquire illegally and sell on. Stamping the postcode on the chassis is another simple identification ploy.

GROUND
Secure Equipment Hog

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