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# Under

**Golf course security shouldn't rely on luck and a few flimsy padlocks to keep the insurance company happy, says Hugh Tilley**

**A**s a general category golf courses must rate alongside farms as the premises which are least protected from theft and vandalism. But this is a generalisation because a number of clubs have learnt the hard way that keeping what is rightfully theirs requires some thought and attention. For the majority, however, all that protects them from an insurance claim is luck and perhaps some flimsy padlocks.

In preparing this feature it seemed logical to ask the local crime prevention officer about his experience, but his good fortune was that in what is still a largely rural area the greatest risks are members' parked cars and the gaming machines in the clubhouse, and the greatest deterrents are lights and staff quarters on the premises. Nevertheless there are parts of the country where theft of greenkeeping equipment and vandalism of the course are an almost everyday occurrence, and the respective clubs take considerable precautions to minimise the disruption. For others it is easy to say insurance will take care of any loss, but insurers have become hard, upping premiums, increasing the excess and/or requiring specific protective action to be taken before renewal. There may also be small print which says that items are not covered unless actually in view or locked away. Either way if a likely investment in security prevents hassle and disruption it must be well worthwhile.

Many courses have footpaths, byways and other public access and these can be a double edged sword, they give ready access to vandals and those of criminal intent, but they also give access to potential witnesses, and there is nothing the former like less than having a witness. This suggests that the simple answer to

protecting many location is to open them up, illuminate them or even have someone living on site. Lighting for car parks, machinery compounds, and buildings is a simple deterrent, and in some circumstances such lights can be linked to passive infra-red (p.i.r.) or other sensors. Access points such as gates may also be worth illuminating. Closed circuit TV (CCTV) can also work well in conjunction with lighting, nor does CCTV need to work continuously to have a deterrent effect. Obviously sitings will be all important to effect, it is no good it there are vulnerable points which are hidden. Typically greenkeepers' sheds are hidden away beyond the ninth and have all round access with vulnerable areas such as windows at the back. Timber and asbestos cement are easy to break or remove, often so easy that putting bars over windows or locking the door is a charade. A strong steel lining inside the shed may be easy to install and effective.

Many courses use ex shipping containers, usually not very pretty ones, but nevertheless effective. There are purpose made secure buildings such as those supplied by Groundhog and another alternative is to build with security in mind. Swinton Park outside Manchester did just that, although it was not a cheap option. Their building holds all their kit as well as housing office, rest area and workshop etc. Again it is not the prettiest of buildings, with two steel doors, no windows and a solid flat concrete roof, but it is vandal proof as well as being highly resistant to theft. The vulnerability of the doors to ramming is avoided by a steel beam locked in front perhaps somewhat drastic but when you have been repeatedly vandalised and lost all

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# lock and key



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your kit with all the disruption this caused, you are inclined to take drastic remedial action.

Many clubs have a 'greenkeepers compound' with a substantial fence or wall around it, this has several advantages not least of which is the fact everything is kept secure and unauthorised persons excluded, which would meet health and safety requirements too. Protection inside this compound may be easier too as it allows movement sensors and alarms to be fitted with a defined area to protect. Screening with trees, shrubs or even climbing plants growing up the fence are

easy options for prettying it up, although you may lose the advantage of it being in sight to passers by. Berberis and other thorny plants are deterrents in their own right, while blackberries provide a nice tasty pie too.

The conventional padlock provides simple and cheap security, however it has disadvantages, one is that it is only as strong as its fastenings, thus thought is needed to ensure that these are sufficiently robust and where possible protect the lock itself from hammers or bolt croppers. It is also essential that locks are re-locked, too often greenkeepers

'forget' – or simply don't bother to lock up, especially when there are many people needing to use the facility. The solution may be multiple keys, it is easy to buy quality locks with many keys and then issue these to each greenkeeper preferably with the instructions that it is to be tied around their neck and guarded as if it were gold! Putting a key under a brick is old hat, and very obvious to the professional thief.

Smaller containers may also be useful around the course for temporary tool or chemical 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 can 'walk' when a greenkeeper's back is turned. A number of firms make these.

If a compound is not an option there are other ways of protecting larger items which cannot be locked in a secure shed. The most obvious is the wheel clamp as this can be used wherever the machine is. Many of the anti-theft devices sold for cars can also be used, particularly to immobilise vehicles. Possibly the greatest risk with tractors and mowers is not so much of them being stolen so

# Under lock and key

much as the probability of joyriders taking them for a scramble around the course, an occurrence which can be more expensive and have greater effect on play than simply losing the machine.

Other effective means of protection are to chain and padlock items to buildings or other substantial structure – even a post concreted into the ground, and while it may be possible to go into any locksmith or traditional ironmonger and get chain and locks, there are specialists in plant security such as Lincoln Master Products who provide proven products and technical know how. Their experience has been with the plant hire industry and contractors plant where plant theft has been rife. The plant hire industry usually lets equipment out on the basis of hirer's risk, so beware and protect hired items as if they were your own.

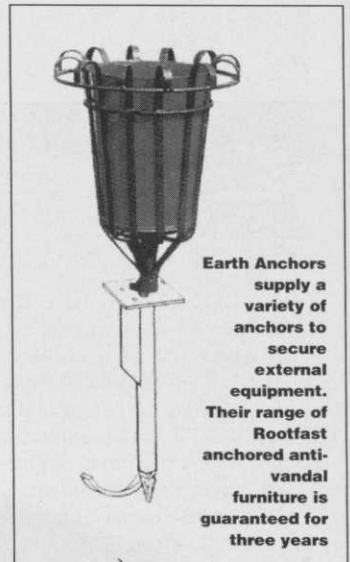
Increasingly modern plant, including tractors and mowers are being made vandal resistant by the manufacturer, in the past it has been too easy to steal batteries, put dirt in the fuel or otherwise render the machine unusable. If your course is vulnerable consider this when buying new equipment. Data tagging is another option offered by at least one major manufacturer, while it is possible to fit one of the tracking systems which will at least almost guarantee that the item is found. Whether these are cost effective for golf course machinery is another matter.

Simple precautions such as keeping the serial numbers of everything which you acquire will help should the item be stolen, it is also useful if ordering parts, and it may help establish both value and provide a stock check. Some clubs have little knowledge

of what equipment they actually own and what should be in the shed. The police suggest that all equipment is marked distinctively, and permanently. Many clubs have a logo, emblem or livery, use of such will help render equipment un-resaleable, thus valueless to the thief. A bright and distinctive colour may also have safety advantages on the course. It may also be worthwhile investing in proper signwriters paint brushes and seeing if anyone on the staff can make a reasonable job of painting the club's name on major items.

There are many types and systems of intruder alarm, and these have become more sophisticated and reliable with expanding demand. There are also many experienced suppliers and fitters, although there are cowboys around. A quiet word at the police station may produce some suggestions, off the record of course.

Deciding on a system and the level of protection required will depend on many factors, such as how great the risk is, proximity of staff housing and so on. There is no point in fitting elaborate electronic detection when there is a good compound, or strong buildings, or even if the location is so remote that no one would get there in time even if called. Where detection is phone or radio linked it is not advisable for anyone to attend unless accompanied with the police notified. A mobile radio is an extra asset. The major problem with any alarm system is that to be effective it need to be responded to, although just having lights go on or an alarm sounded is a strong deterrent. If there is habitation close by this may be sufficient, alternatively it may be possible to link to the clubhouse or steward directly or by telephone, or where there are no phone lines by radio. It is also possible to link to a security service or direct to the police station so that they do the monitoring. Generally such a level of surveillance is only justified for the clubhouse bar, and the chances are that with green-keeping equipment any thief would be in and out before anyone attended. Attending a break-in in the middle of the night



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tends only to result in lost sleep, catching someone red-handed is probably more fiction than fact.

Detection can be as simple as the common p.i.r lighting, investing a little more than the cost of a DIY shed unit will give better reliability and discrimination, or as sophisticated as a complete linked system with multiple sensors, an autodialler and video recording. Once you get to these levels you may as well include a fire alarm so you have double protection, but beware of smoking, lighting a bonfire close by or burning the bacon. The Bristol Yellow Pages lists eight pages of 'Burglar Alarms' with twelve of 'Security Services' – this is big business, so there has to be one near you! The National Approved Council for Security Systems – NACOSS – phone 01628 37512, provides addresses of approved local installers.

The local crime prevention officer is another useful, and free, source of advice, and one which should be reasonably unbiased. Advice may also be available from your insurer. But theft and vandalism are not the only reasons for 'security', security should be an all embracing concept, and if it has not been done it would pay most clubs to undertake a security audit. This should look at obvious health and safety dangers such as flying golf balls alongside public access, lakes and reservoirs and all premises to which the public can gain access, legally or not.

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