

Hugh Tilley examines the unwelcome phenomenon afflicting many golf clubs and looks at crime prevention.

# Security and vandalism



Sign of the times: Golf clubs need to be vigilant against intruders

Levels of theft and vandalism vary greatly around the country, some greenkeepers on urban courses wake up each morning wondering what they will find when they go out. Others have to send someone round the course before play just to replace flags and rakes, but still the majority seldom if ever have any problem. Thus many clubs take minimal precautions against theft, however a growing number have elaborate electronic surveillance installed.

Vandalism is often more of a problem than theft, for while the loss of a strimmer or Flymo is annoying, the destruction of a green upon which you have lavished care is heart-breaking as well as disrupting play. For obvious reasons none of the greenkeepers to whom Greenkeeper Interna-

tional spoke nor their club are named. Both municipal and private courses were contacted, most were parkland courses but in both rural and urban locations, and they were selected more or less at random along a line from Liverpool to North London. Also several commercial security firms were contacted, few have specific experience of protecting greenkeepers facilities, although none saw this as a problem should be they be asked. Classified directories offer a list of local suppliers installers, but this does not vouch for their ability. NACOSS approval should offer some guarantee of standard but it does not cover all systems. Greenkeeper International also contacted some suppliers of secure buildings and containers.

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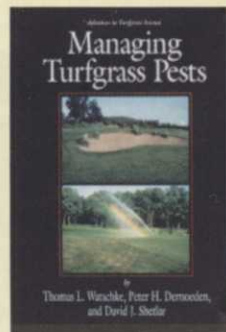
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commented that the need for security, was a sad reflection on the society we live in today, however several also said that they felt that golf courses fared better than many other businesses. There is remarkable acceptance of theft and vandalism – finding flags used as javelins, buildings broken into and the odd strimmer or hover mower lost would seem to be par for many courses. If you are visited once by the light fingered brigade you can expect more visits, they know when they are onto a good thing, so if the horse bolts once lock the stable door before you lose more. Only one incident was reported where the police had apprehended the thieves and recovered the goods.

Increasing numbers of clubs are thinking seriously about security, perhaps spurred on by their insurers and escalating premiums, perhaps by the general heightened awareness of security in the com-

munity, or perhaps actually by their mounting losses.

## Vandalism

No one offered a complete answer to this, most clubs experienced some incidents ranging from the occasional to the regular – where Monday was always commenced by a hunt the flag exercise. Bikers on the course would seem a problem for some, and there are incidents reported of cars running riot across fairways and greens. One private course has security patrols over the weekend, another, a municipal course, used to have a mounted policeman on regular patrol until town hall politics stopped this. Some success was claimed for both of these. Otherwise precautions may be possible such as fastening down seats, waste bins and other course furniture, some items are available in vandal resistant and heavyweight

designs with better resistance to destruction.

Public rights of way are often seen as a potential danger area giving ready access (and a fast exit) for the miscreant, however an alternative view was offered that they can be an advantage because it can put more eyes on the course. In fact one greenkeeper even suggested that encouraging the public to walk their dogs was one way of getting unpaid patrols, he did not go as far as suggesting putting in extra rights of way. Most clubs try to restrict access. One greenkeeper said he was lucky in that his course is ring fenced with just two access points – many others have this advantage. Once access is restricted it is easy to keep these locations under surveillance or even guard them.

Michael Webb, of Devizes based TH White Installations Ltd, said that options in these situations

include installing closed circuit TV, (CCTV) or even a dummy camera. TH White has a system called 'Vocalite' which, activated by a detector, switches on lights and announces that the alarm or CCTV has been activated. Crime-watch and other TV programmes has shown how effective the camera can be. However, Michael Webb said that it is vital to use the right camera with the right lens and position it correctly for the best picture.

Some clubs have the advantage of natural barriers, like the sea or a river, or man made barriers such as industrial estates or factories which have their own security fencing. Unfortunately the obvious intrusiveness of fencing detracts from the essence of a golf course, however physical barriers such as wood and shrub land can be equally effective, especially if species such as quickthorn, pyracantha and barberry are planted.



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Typical greenkeepers' machinery stores, with roller shuttered doors. From Panelite.

Electric sheep fencing is quite effective too – and it can be alarmed.

#### Buildings and Compounds

One particular Midlands club which found itself becoming too charitable, having its sheds broken into regularly, has built new 'sheds' of brick with barred windows and steel doors, – and an alarm system. Another in a very high risk area several years ago went even further and had both walls and roof made of reinforced concrete with no windows just two steel doors reinforced by a steel girder barrier outside – to prevent ramming. Few clubs need to go this far, however many still have wooden or asbestos cement walls which are easily broken into, although several have reinforced such by installing concrete block or steel linings – not difficult as a DIY job. Nevertheless windows and doors frequently remain vulnerable, or are protected by padlocks which can be cut or hammered off easily. Modification may be possible to protect locks. Intruder alarms should probably only be seen as a second line of defence because once entry has been effected the damage is already done.

The normal and most cost effective design for a greenkeeper's

shed is a steel portal frame building with brick or blockwork half height walls sheeted above with fibre reinforced cement, steel or aluminium profile sheets bolted on and with steel doors. Rooflights may avoid any need for windows. Several firms manufacture such buildings and most offer a complete service which will take it from planning approval through to completion. Another popular solution is to buy ex-shipping containers, but these are not pretty although they can be tarted up with a little paint, or even a veneer of shiplap boarding. They also have the disadvantage of being narrow and not easy to store larger items such as greens triples or tractors in. There are also purpose made security buildings some designed to blend into the landscape such as those provided by Cleveland Sitesafe who have considerable experience in this field.

However determined thieves will get into virtually any building and this is when a detection system comes into its own. For many clubs the sheds are in fact an assortment of buildings with some kit stored outside, for these the best option may be a surrounding compound with just one official entrance. How secure this fence or wall needs to be will

depend on risk and cost assessment. Once the area is defined it is simple to install detection equipment.

#### Detection and Alarms

There are several forms of detection each appropriate for a particular location and circumstance. Consideration is also needed as to how to handle a detection. If there is no one around to respond it may be best to deter unwelcome guests such as by switching on lights or giving an announcement of the detection. These methods may be best for external areas as it is not acceptable to link external detectors to a monitoring service and the police. Passive Infra-red (p.i.r.) is well known and inexpensive for switching on lighting, however p.i.r. is not reliable as it is too prone to false signals. Better is 'dual technology' which combines motion detection with heat detection so that neither motion by inanimate objects nor heat from non moving objects produce a response while persons and vehicle with heat and movement do. Good selection and detection can also be obtained by using photo-electric beam sensors across a specific entrance. In fact such sensors can be made into an invisible fence over con-

siderable lengths if necessary.

As stated previously CCTV is particularly effective in detection but when the camera is obvious it is respected as a deterrent. Dummy cameras are available which can be used with almost the same effect but considerable less cost.

Forced entry is normally relatively easy and cheap to detect with simple switches, breaking glass detectors and other devices, and there are many reliable control boxes to take input from such devices and give an output signal. Most of these controls now use a keypad and codes for activation and inactivation, and more sophisticated versions can also be used to store information such as by whom and when they are operated. They also allow codes to be changed easily and regularly.

While the prime object must always be to deter a thief or vandal, once they have gained access to a building the need is to catch them. How this is done again depends on circumstances and whether anyone can respond within an acceptable length of time. Not everyone will be prepared to respond, and there may even be personal danger in doing so. If a greenkeeper is going to be expected to respond he should be



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equipped with a mobile phone so that he can report and get support. Otherwise the prudent answer is to employ a monitoring service which notifies police and/or other parties as required. Most alarm systems can include fire and smoke detection. In the case of a golf club it may be sensible to consider the greenkeepers facility as just another zone within overall club protection, with clubhouse bar and pro shop usually being a greater risk.

There are several monitoring systems, some use the telephone line and auto dialling, which can be cut or jammed, others require a dedicated line but give warning if the line is cut while other systems use radio either to a local base station or to an individual receiver. Usually with such systems the aim is not to let intruders know that they have been detected so giving maximum time for effective response – so that



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they can be caught red-handed. In fact this seldom happens because response times are too long.

One club contacted by Greenkeeper International said that the pro's shop had been broken into so regularly despite alarms that the professional bought a van and

takes all the most valuable items home with him each night.

#### **Specific equipment protection**

It may be worth considering specific protection for some items, such as concreting posts and rings for padlocking plant to, or immobilisers for vehicles. All ter-

rain vehicles are very desirable thus special devices have been produced specifically for these. Data tags and location systems are also available although cost rules these out for most golf clubs. Simple deterrent is possible by making equipment conspicuous – with names, post codes or bright paint to make a thief think twice about saleability. Post codes are a simple way of assisting return to a rightful owner should the item be discovered.

One club with a driving range said that their lights had proved desirable and so have had to be wired into the alarm system – the first snip alerting the monitoring station to tip off the police – this has been successful to a point – the goods were recovered last time but no prosecution resulted as the “thief” said he had found them lying beside the road.

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