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Day

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. Fairly regular losses of small items such as hover mowers and trimmers seem to be quite widespread, but there are reports of large items such as ride-on triples or tractors having gone missing. Because these larger items are so specialised it is more difficult to find a market for them

- and without a market there is little point in stealing them. Of course larger items are also more conspicuous and need larger vehicles for their transport. Nevertheless some very expensive plant does go missing - and when it does it can cause a considerable disruption of work. It is often a matter of conjecture how

some of these items are removed without any witnesses. Marking larger items is also fairly easy, for instance Kubota operate a marking system using microdots available through all their dealers. It is also possible to mark with paint or with an ultra-violet pen, however, such methods do require that the machine or item is found in suspicious circumstances, and for someone to query the ownership. A simple method is to have stencils cut with the club name and use a spray marker to put your name on all major items. Bona-fide second hand buyers should not have a problem with this.

There are many courses where the greenkeepers' shed is well away from the clubhouse with its own entry and exit to the road, these must be at greater risk. Very few of these premises are locked during the day and few have any security for hours of darkness, nor are most difficult to enter even if the doors are locked. Conventional 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" nor is it unknown for turf to be stripped or trees



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Theft is a growth industry at golf clubs but Hugh Tilley investigates the best ways to reduce the chances of it happening to you...

light robbery

removed under cover of darkness.

Vandalism is very disrupting to the daily routine, and a number of clubs have instigated dawn patrols with 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 misplacing 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, people 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 club 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 fence at 15 per metre - some mile of road exposed perimeter. Needless to say this club also has CCTV, floodlighting and internal monitored security alarms. The secretary commented that this is a considerable cost to the members, but experience has shown that it is essential.

Vandalism would appear to be one of the most difficult problems to solve. The comment from an assistant at one of the Birmingham clubs was that many of the things which he would like to do were illegal! - such as wholesale smacking of kids and putting an electric fence around the course. Holidays, particularly sum-

mer holidays, required extra vigilance - and a routine dawn patrol. One Merseyside club has enlisted help from an artisan group and offers policemen reduced fees. Nevertheless both of these clubs have their sheds secured and alarmed.

Further protection can be offered to greenkeeping facilities which are away from the main club complex by creating a secure fenced compound. Floodlights activated by p.i.r. 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 unmolested, and expects to have left the scene within that time.

Secure buildings or compartments can provide a safe home for smaller tools, particularly more desirable ones 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 there is the option to get a local



builder to make something specifically for the purpose. Chemicals will require their own store. Thorny shrubs such as quickthorn, berberis and pyracantha are effective deterrents in their own right.

Removable lockable posts can be used to protect doorways and obstruct road access, and these can be used to prevent doors being rammed, or to prevent specific equipment being moved, or they can simply prevent vehicular access. There are also other types of barrier with which to prevent access. Many locks are available with multiple keys, it is also easy to add 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.