

Safe as Houses

Every year the theft of equipment costs hundreds of millions of pounds and there is no sign of these figures declining even with all the modern security technology that is now available. As a result insurance companies are now stipulating that owners take stringent measures to protect their machinery from being stolen. The most sophisticated security systems can be in place but if someone fails to set it correctly or to switch it on, it is useless. In addition, to having systems to protect against theft every member of staff needs to be made aware of the importance of security and being vigilant.



As far as golf courses are concerned, there are generally three types of crime committed involving machinery.

1. Stealing thousands of pounds worth of grass cutting equipment is very likely to be done by professional thieves and requires a number of individuals and some very careful planning. There is also the problem of disposing of their ill-gotten gains so in most cases the large thefts will be done to order.
2. Then there are the opportunists thieves. They see a chance and grab what is available. Smaller pieces of machinery tools and easily transported items are their targets. These can be disposed of easily through outlets like car boot sales.
3. Finally there is vandalism. Persons break into a building, especially if it is isolated, and destroy machines and other items just for the fun of it.

On top of losing valuable equipment there is the trauma of having been broken into and all the other inconveniences that go with the aftermath of a burglary.

Consider the following scenario. Imagine a local golf course is staging a major competition and during the week preceding this event a gang of thieves break into the main machinery store. The problems this nightmare would throw up can be devastating for all involved. First to go will be staff moral as they struggle to find equipment to maintain the high standards the players have come to expect. The insurance company, in most cases will cover the cost of new equipment but there still may be a shortfall in cash. The period taken to settle a claim could take weeks rather than days. Considerable time is taken up dealing with the necessary paperwork and helping the police. The repercussions are likely to continue for a long time. When the insurance premium next comes up for renewal the fact a robbery has taken place will reflect in the new figures.

While there is not the remotest possibility that any premises can be made a 100% secure or that someone will not take an opportunity to steal equipment, a great deal can be done to prevent and reduce the possibilities of a crime. To achieve this means working closely with the local police.

I recently put this into practise by visiting a golf course with a Crime Reduction Officer.

The officer started by saying that any crime prevention methods he made must be appropriate, realistic and most importantly cost effective. Prior to giving any advice he warns that a club may be under legal restrictions such as Building and/or Planning Regulations, Health & Safety and the Occupiers Liability Act 1984. This last act covers owners responsibilities, to any visitor to the property (including burglars) to ensure their safety.

Crime Reduction Officers use the 'Onion Peeling Principal' when conducting a security survey; they start at the outside and work in to the risk target.

BOUNDARIES

These will be extensive on most courses and are generally made up of a variety of barriers in the form of fences and hedges, which need to be maintained in good repair. Where applicable "Private Property" and "No Trespassing" signs should be erected. The positioning of these clearly informs the public where they cannot go and assist staff if there is a need to challenge a member of the public. Strangers loitering about could be harmless; on the other hand they may be up to no good. On courses where there are public rights of way, such as footpaths or bridle ways, these need to be clearly marked

Everyone should keep on the look out for any vehicle parked up in isolated areas. It might just be an amorous courting couple or a thief checking out the lie of the land and watching your working practices to determine when is the best time to strike. Even if this situation is not related to the course, by making a note of the vehicle's registration number might turn out to be valuable if a nearby house being broken into or a far worse crime is committed.

Roland Taylor gives some invaluable advice on making your maintenance facility as secure as possible

GATES AND ENTRANCES

Gates need to be locked, especially at night. Check the hinges. These should be capped to prevent the gate being lifted off using a car jack. For open entrances and driveways raised locking posts are the answer. Alarms and lighting are other deterrents (these are dealt with later).

OUTDOOR PARKING AREAS

It is best to keep as little as possible equipment in these areas, especially vehicles, ATVs, tractors and trailers. If this is not possible any machinery left on these sites needs securing using lock downs, ground anchors, wheel clamps or steering locks. Always remember to remove all keys and on some units it could be worth fitting immobilisers, alarms and trackers. Always use top quality chains and padlocks.

IDENTIFYING YOUR PROPERTY

It is good housekeeping to keep records, each piece of equipment should have a record card that includes a photograph together with details of when purchased, model, engine and machine serial numbers plus any chassis numbers.

There are now plenty of sophisticated systems, for identifying machinery and their components, now on the market. It is worth doing some research and chose a reputable security company to assist you.

Some new systems use designated numbers, which are placed, in recorded locations throughout the machine. Small quantities of warning stickers are displayed adjacent to various visible, designated number sites. This is designed to alert prospective thieves to the fact that the machine is marked and any attempt to eliminate the numbers is pointless, as finding all the locations is impossible. Electronic tagging and micro dots are also both placed on the machine and their locations are recorded. These require specialist equipment to read them so they act as an identification back up. Photographs are taken of the equipment and the owner receives a registration document that shows a small percentage of the sites where the numbers are placed. The remainder are kept on the systems supplier's secure database and qualifying parties and the police can receive full details any time it becomes necessary.

BUILDINGS

All buildings housing equipment need to be kept in good repair, especially the windows and doors. It is advisable that the windows are fitted with either bars or mesh on the inside and any that are not in use are boarded up. Secure doors with at least two shackled padlocks and use threaded coach bolts for the hinges. A lockable steel cage inside the building is ideal for storing small pieces of machinery, tools and chemicals. Spades make ideal crowbars. All workshop equipment and tools should be locked away in steel cabinets. It is important to mark all these items for identification with the local postcode. If they are stolen and turn up in another part of the country at least the police there will know the area they have come from and where to start looking for the owners.

During the day it is very easy to leave buildings open or unlocked while staff are working out on the course. An opportunist thief loves this as he can be in and out before anyone notices. Ensure that all buildings and compounds are locked even when empty and that the keys are removed.

OUTSIDE MAIN BUILDINGS

Wherever possibly all out building should be located as near as possible to the main complex. Because these are often not very attractive there is a tendency to screen them off. It is best if there is a clear line of sight from the complex to any outbuildings. High wire fencing or dense thorn hedging will restrict access but beware of the Occupiers Liability Act. If glass, barbed or razor wire has been installed and an intruder is injured they can sue for damages. There needs to be plenty of 'Private Property Keep Out' warning signs about.



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Safe as Houses



Gate hinges need to be capped so they cannot be lifted off



Place small equipment and tools in padlocked, steel storage container

ALARMS

These are part of all security packages. Professionally installed systems should conform to BS44737/EN50131 and DIY ones to BS60707. If a building is located in an isolated spot a Police Call Alarm System which is monitored is the answer if possible. There are plenty of remote alarm systems now available that will transmit over a mile and these are ideal for buildings away from the main complex.

Depending on the type of alarm it is activated by either movement, pressure, line interruption or personnel attack. Some DIY models are connected to a telephone line and will ring a home telephone or mobile, if activated.

At this stage it should be pointed out that Non Police Call (Unmonitored) systems would not normally get a police response unless additional information is supplied.

A Police Response Alarm must have NACOSS/SSIAB approval and be able to send confirmed activation by visual, audio or sequential confirmation. In addition, two key holders who can arrive on site within 20 minutes are also required.

LIGHTS

This is one of the biggest deterrents it is therefore an important consideration especially around gates and buildings in general. Avoid using very bright lights, as they tend to throw deep shadows in areas they do not cover. The type that are timed or activated by dusk and sensors are a better choice. They need to be backed up by movement activated (PIR) lighting.

CLOSE CIRCUIT TELEVISION (CCTV)

Professional advice should be sought before embarking down this route, as it can be a very expensive exercise. A major contributor to their success is quality of available light. The images recorded must be sharp if they are used for identification in court. Recording tapes deteriorate each time they are overwritten so it is important to ensure new tapes are installed regularly.

Cameras tend to act more as a deterrent. Professionals will wear some form of face mask and cover up or fit false number plates to their vehicles. The chances are that all you will be left with is a video showing unidentifiable figures moving round a vehicle at a certain time during the night. Again, it is important to display signs around the site warning of the public that CCTV is operating in the area. It is very likely you will also have to have Data Protection Registration and fulfil the requirements of the Data Protection Act regarding CCTV.

BEING AWARE

It cannot be said too often that vigilance by staff is important and they should be encouraged to report anything suspicious such as tampered locks or strangers hanging around the course and buildings. They also need to be constantly made aware of the dangers of leaving any equipment and their personnel belongings unsecured or unattended.

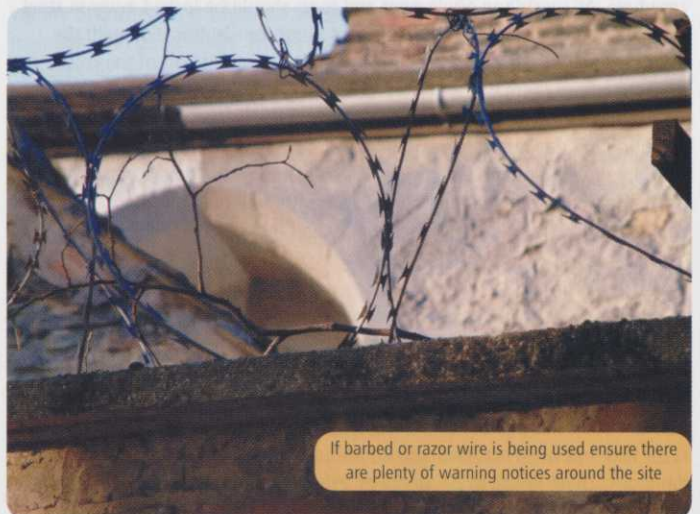
Immediately, inform your local police forces of any incidents. They really do want to catch those members of society who create mayhem and make lives a misery by stealing. To achieve this, the police need your help and evidence if they are to successfully prosecute these offenders. Prevention is far better than wasting considerable time and resources detecting a crime.

Readers who require further advice on security, or wish to arrange for Crime Reduction Officer to visit their course should contact their local Police Headquarters.

Finally, if someone sidles up to you in a pub or contacts you offering any equipment tell the police or ring CRIMESTOPPERS on 080055511. You could be doing one of your colleagues in the industry a tremendous favour.

The watchwords are "Be Vigilant".

My sincere thanks to John Middlemass, Crime Reduction Officer for Cambridgeshire Constabulary and a golf course that shall remain anonymous.



If barbed or razor wire is being used ensure there are plenty of warning notices around the site