

**TACKLING THEFT**  
**In The Equestrian Community**



**Security Advice**  
**from**  
**Bedfordshire Police**  
(February 2007)



# TACKLING CRIME IN THE EQUESTRIAN COMMUNITY

## Security Advice From Bedfordshire Police

Every year, thousands of pounds worth of horse-related equipment is stolen from premises throughout the country. The huge market in second-hand tack sadly encourages less honest individuals to steal property for a quick monetary return.

Very often the tack room and other outbuildings have a very poor standard of security, which is alarming when you consider the average value of a saddle is around £1,000 – considerably more if you have handmade made-to-measure items. Few people actually bother marking their saddles and ancillary equipment, which makes identifying stolen saddles virtually impossible. Much of the following crime prevention advice can easily, *and often cheaply*, be implemented and will help deter would-be tack thieves.

### THE PERIMETER

As with any form of site security you should start with the perimeter and work your way towards the centre. This is especially relevant with equestrian crime because it is the safety of the animal that is of paramount importance and an animal can be vulnerable both in the paddock and the stable. In the majority of cases where animals have been stolen, and occasionally attacked, the crime was made possible due to poor perimeter security. The following points should be considered:

**Fencing around paddocks** should not just be seen as a means of defining a boundary but as the first line of defence. Three or four strands of wire may be enough to stop the animals escaping but it would only take three snips with wire cutters to create an exit wide enough to remove your horse. The same fence but with the addition of sheep netting makes creating the same opening a different proposition. A well-made post and rail fence is even better whilst a fence incorporating a dense (and perhaps prickly) hedge is ideal.

**Gates** are often the weakest points in the perimeter and, as such, need careful consideration (field gates themselves are valuable and often stolen). Metal gates tend to be more secure. **Gateposts** should be securely cemented into the ground. **Gate hinges** need to have the tops burred over or welded to prevent the gate being lifted off. The gate should be kept padlocked at all times. A good heavy-duty chain (motorcycle security chains can be useful) and the best quality close-shackled padlocks (to resist bolt croppers) that you can afford need to be used.

**Alarm equipment**, designed specifically for use in the countryside is available and is suitable for enhancing perimeter security – particularly gateways, gaps between buildings, paths, etc.

**Anti-poaching equipment**, such as trip wire devices that fire a blank shotgun cartridge, can also legitimately be used to give early warning or frighten away an intruder.

### THE STABLE YARD

Stables, tack rooms and outbuildings that make up the average stable yard are one of the most common targets for the rural criminal. This is because they are often sited in fairly remote locations and are frequently left unattended for long periods, sometimes overnight. Tack rooms in particular can be very rewarding if you are a thief.

Most of the points regarding perimeter security are also relevant to the yard, which ideally will have its own perimeter protection, including locked gates. Preventing unauthorised people easily entering and leaving a yard will go a long way towards preventing theft and/or damage.

Efforts should be made not to leave tools and other equipment on full view around the yard. Not only are they likely to be attractive to the rural thief, many of them could be used to break in to the stable or tack room. A shovel, for instance, makes an excellent lever and is often used to force open a door or window. Even simple tools can be expensive to replace.

If you have staff, encourage them to challenge strangers in a friendly manner. For instance, asking "can I help you?" will discourage any potential offender because they know they have been seen and can be described to the police.

## STABLE, TACK ROOM, ETC

Stables and tack rooms are commonly built of wood, and are often only a little more robust than a large garden shed. This is a crucial factor when it comes to the security of such constructions. Rarely does a brick built stable block get broken into, whereas wooden ones are regularly entered via doors, windows, walls and occasionally even the roof. This does not have to be the case; the following points may prevent it from happening.

**The walls and roof** of a wooden stable, and the tack room in particular, can be reinforced by adding a lining of weld mesh or steel reinforcing grid (as used to reinforce cement floors, etc) to the inside. The lining, in addition to being attached to the walls and roof, should be welded or wired together to form an internal cage. If necessary, the mesh can be hidden beneath internal wall cladding. This is surprisingly easy to accomplish and will add considerably to the security of the building.

**Windows** should be kept to the absolute minimum, particularly in the tack room where, if possible, it is better to have no windows at all. Where windows are necessary the glazing should be of a polycarbonate material or laminated glass. Consideration should be given to fitting grills or bars as added protection. Non-opening windows are to be preferred.

**Doors** are the most common point of entry into a tack room for the criminal. This is because stable/tack room doors are commonly secured with poor quality padlocks and a hasp and staple (also known as a pad bar) which is simply screwed into the woodwork and relatively easy to remove. Ideally the tack room door will be robust enough (a minimum of 44mm thick) to accommodate a 5 lever mortise lock (when buying a mortise lock always choose one which carries the British Standard 3621, or look for the 'kite mark'). Preferably two locks should be fitted at equal distances from top and bottom to spread door strength.

Where padlocks are used they should be of the close-shackle type to prevent bolt cropping, and be used in conjunction with a security grade pad bar. This should be attached using long bolts, not wood screws. The bolts need to go through a metal backing plate on the inside of the door and wall. If the door is outward opening, the hinges may be exposed and open to attack. Where this is the case 'hinge bolts' need to be fitted adjacent to each hinge. This is a device designed to stop the door being forced open by removing or damaging the hinges and forcing the door out of the frame on that side.

It must be borne in mind that any door is only as strong as the frame it is fitted into and that it may be necessary to reinforce the frame prior to improving the locks, etc. Where this is the case, it may be advantageous to consult the relevant Crime Reduction Officer or your local locksmith. Serious consideration should be given to the installation of good quality alarms and security lighting in and around the stables.

## ALARMS AND LIGHTING

Where possible, full use should be made of modern electronic security aids. Modern alarm systems are reasonably priced, (particularly when compared with the value of the property it is able to protect) simple to use, reliable and a proven deterrent against crime.

**Alarms:** broadly speaking alarm systems are used in two ways. The first, and cheapest, is to use what is commonly called a 'bells only' system which, when activated, makes a loud noise in and around the premises to be protected. This often includes flashing lights as well as the sounder and relies on the criminal being frightened away by the noise and the fact that anyone hearing it will call the police. In most cases, providing there is someone living within earshot, this is a most effective deterrent. Unfortunately, stables are often sited in more remote areas where it is obvious that the alarm, unless someone lives on site will not be heard. Under these circumstances the solution is to install the next level of alarm which is the 'remotely monitored system'. This will be a similar system to that described above but which is linked, by a conventional telephone, mobile phone or radio, to a professionally run monitoring station who respond by calling the police should it activate. This, because of the costs involved in providing the link to the monitoring station and the annual cost of the monitoring, is a more expensive option.

Additionally there are 'do-it-yourself' systems available, some of which can be programmed to transmit an alarm call to designated telephone numbers via a concealed mobile phone and battery. Such systems can be invaluable on sites with no mains power or telephone line. A trip to a local security specialist or a major DIY outlet will reveal a whole range of equipment. When buying alarm equipment, you should ensure that it meets the relevant British Standard BS4737 for professionally installed systems of BS6707 for DIY systems.

**Lighting:** whilst security lighting will not have the same deterrent value of an alarm system it is still a valuable aid to security and will certainly send some would-be thieves elsewhere. On the other hand, activation from animals and birds must be expected.

Typically a good security lighting system will comprise of powerful halogen lighting units which are activated by Passive Infrared Detectors (PIR) when movement is detected within the target area. The lights will stay on for a predetermined time before resetting. A photoelectric cell prevents the lights activating during daylight. In addition, it is sometimes possible to connect the PIRs to a bell or buzzer that can act as a deterrent during daylight.

Alternatively, PIRs can be incorporated into existing external lighting to produce a similar, if not as startling, effect. Security lighting normally requires mains power but other sources such as battery or solar power is available for more isolated sites.

## SECURITY MARKING YOUR HORSE

**Freeze Marking:** this is a form of branding which permanently marks the animal with a unique code. Unlike the traditional 'hot' brand, this method is far less traumatic for the animal and the end result is usually more visible. An excellent visible deterrent against theft and a sure method of identification should the animal be stolen. There are several companies who offer a freeze-branding service.

**Electronic Tagging:** an electronically identifiable tag implanted into the animal by a vet. The tag can be 'read' by scanning the animal with an electronic reader. Several companies offer this service and your local veterinary practice will be able to advise you where to go. The negative aspects of such tagging is that the reader used by the company 'A' will not detect a tag used by company 'B' and the police will not have direct access to a reader.

**Hoof Branding:** a method of branding a postcode into the front of your horse's hooves. Can act as a deterrent and/or means of identification. Easily carried out by your farrier two or three times a year. Branding irons need to be tailor made and will cost around £155.00. The negative side is that they are not always visible, the hooves invariably being covered in mud and, as the hoof grows, it needs re-branding.

**Photographs & Records:** good photographs of a horse will always assist its recovery if stolen. Photographs should be clear and show details of colour patterns and an idea of height. It may be necessary to keep more than one photograph. A diagrammatic record of the animal should also be kept which will show details of relevant marks such as head, neck and other whorls, acquired marks, scars etc.

## TACK SECURITY

There are many products on the market that offer security for tack either by physical marking such as post-coding, target hardening such as locking the saddle to its rack or by target removal, such as hiding or locking it out of sight.

Most saddles have their own unique manufacturers number ('Stubben' have a special serial number, and all new 'Jeffries' saddles are sold with an electronic tag already inserted) but these are rarely recorded by the owner.

**Tack Marking:** the simplest method is to have the tack 'post-coded'. This involves stamping the postcode, along with the house number or initials of the name, into the leather. Metal items can be engraved with the same details. This can be done free through Horsecatch schemes or by arrangement with the local police station.

It is also possible to have saddles electronically tagged but this can be problematic due to the amount of companies offering the service. Under the policy police stations will not hold electronic readers until one is produced which will read all electronic tags.

**Saddle Locks:** there are several devices available which physically lock the saddle to its rack in the tack room. These are a good deterrent, particularly if the tack room itself is secure. Additionally 'tack safes' are available. These are made from galvanised steel and can be bolted to a wall or inside a horsebox.

## TRAILER/HORSEBOX SECURITY

Wheel clamps are a good cost-effective way to secure your trailer when left overnight at a showground. They are widely available from a variety of motoring retailers or caravan outlets.

**Tow hitch locks** are another cost-effective deterrent and again they are widely available.

**Post-coding** the chassis and other metal parts of a horsebox or trailer is a simple and cheap method of identification. This can be done with the same stamping equipment that most police stations use to code pedal cycles.

Another method is to mark the roof of the horsebox/trailer with paint or custom made vinyl lettering (in much the same way as police vehicles) This lettering is virtually impossible to remove and is easily visible from road bridges and police aircraft. The owner should keep a record of where the trailer has been marked.

**Chemical Identification:** chemically identifiable paint is available commercially. Designed originally for the construction industry it is sold in batches and the chemical identity of each batch is recorded, as is the purchaser.

Items marked with the paint can very quickly be traced back through the company to a small group, or even an individual if a large enough batch has been bought. Ideal for use on trailer and other bulky equipment.

**Satellite/Terrestrial Tracking Units:** these are an excellent method of locating and recovering expensive horseboxes and/or trailers. A relatively cheap, (when compared to the loss of a vehicle and possibly a horse along with it) and thoroughly reliable piece of equipment.

## WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

### **Bedfordshire Police Crime Reduction Officers:**

Bedford, Kempston, Biggleswade, Pottton, Sandy & surrounding villages

Pete Spicer and Lara Curtayne on 01234 275273

Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Hought Regis, Ampthill & surrounding villages

John Shiels and Lesley Johnson on 01582 473428

**Ringmaster:** to register for Ringmaster call 01234 275288

### **Useful Websites:**

[www.ukhorsewatch.org.uk](http://www.ukhorsewatch.org.uk)

[www.naturallyhorses.org.uk](http://www.naturallyhorses.org.uk)

[www.stolenhorseregister.com](http://www.stolenhorseregister.com)

[www.trailerwatch.com](http://www.trailerwatch.com)

### **Crime Reduction Product Suppliers:**

[www.c-p-p.co.uk](http://www.c-p-p.co.uk) (crime prevention products)

[www.property-marking.co.uk](http://www.property-marking.co.uk)

[www.jnemarketing.com](http://www.jnemarketing.com)

**Horse Watch:** [rowena-james@supadooper.com](mailto:rowena-james@supadooper.com)