



TACKLING CRIME IN THE EQUESTRIAN COMMUNITY

Security Advice From Suffolk 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.

THE STABLE YARD

Make sure your yard does not attract unwanted visitors or thieves. Try not to advertise your location with road signs or livery adverts. If you have a drive up to the stables install a gate at the road end to deter casual callers.

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. Do not label the tack room door; it makes it too easy for thieves to find. Horsewatch can provide yard security signs to advise that property is marked as a deterrent to theft.



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. Never leave head collars hanging outside for thieves to lead your horse away with.


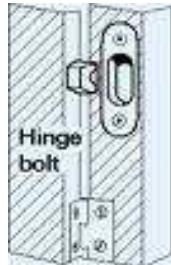
If you have staff, encourage them to challenge strangers in a friendly manner. For instance, asking “can I help you?” will discourage any potential offender because they know they have been seen and can be described to the police.

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. Brick built tack rooms and enclosed outbuildings are less vulnerable purely due to the material they are constructed from but stables as a whole are usually quite open whatever they are made of. Wooden buildings are regularly entered via doors, windows, walls and occasionally even

the roof, however 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. Roller blinds on the inside can be used to obscure the contents of the tack room from prying eyes.
- 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 and / 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. (Ideally should be registered with the [Master Locksmiths Association](#))

ALARMS AND LIGHTING

Serious consideration should be given to the installation of good quality alarms and security lighting in and around the stables.

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.

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 effect. PIR lighting units are effective where they will be noticed; in really remote locations they may not be such a good idea.



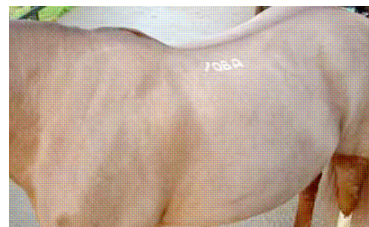
The use of 'dusk to dawn' lighting will provide permanent illumination through the hours of darkness. Dusk to dawn lights fitted with photoelectric cells are energy saving, provide less obtrusive light and can be a cheaper alternative. Security lighting normally requires mains power but other sources such as battery or solar power is available for more isolated sites.

There is a fine line between lighting the stable yard to deter intruders and assisting the criminal with bright lighting. The systems mentioned above to be taken into consideration when reviewing yard security but every site is different and there are no hard and fast rules for security lighting.

SECURITY MARKING YOUR HORSE

Unless your horse can be easily identified he will be nearly impossible to tell apart from thousands of others. Make sure you have a good selection of summer and winter photographs from all angles and a correctly completed passport drawing. You should also ensure your horse can be positively identified by anyone. Even if he only escapes from the field there must be way to trace him back to you.

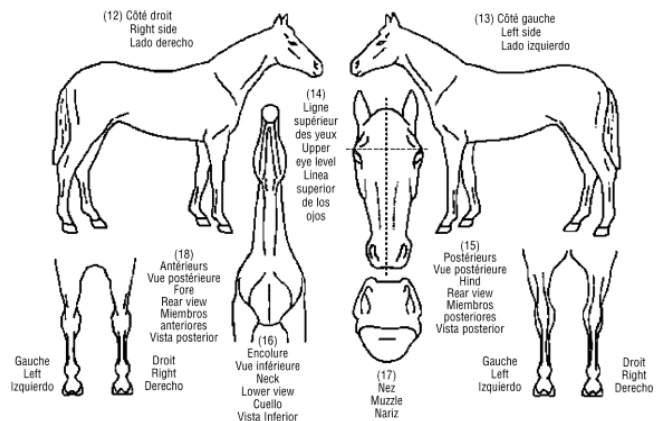
Freeze Marking: this is a form of branding which permanently marks the animal with a unique code. Unlike the traditional 'hot' brand, this method is far less traumatic for the animal and the end result is usually more visible. An excellent visible deterrent against theft and a sure method of identification should the animal be stolen. There are several companies who offer a freeze-branding service. It is a lifetime identifier that is supported by a registration pack, transferable to subsequent owners. There is an excellent record of recovery for freeze branded equines, unmarked they are sometimes never found.



Microchips: an electronically identifiable tag implanted into the animal by a vet. The microchip 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 aspect 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. Unfortunately microchips are not a visible deterrent against theft.

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.



Passports: Horse passports are not a permanent form of identification but they can assist identification, particularly of an untagged animal. Under the Horse Passports Act 2003 all equines must have a passport (this includes ponies, donkeys, and other equidae). Hopefully, this will reduce horse thefts; owners cannot sell, export, slaughter for human consumption, use for the purposes of competition or breeding, a horse which does not have a passport.

Whilst it is not a legal requirement to carry a passport for every journey, there are a number of very important exceptions. These are:

- 1) When a horse is moved into or out of Great Britain
- 2) When a horse is used for the purposes of competition
- 3) When a horse is moved to the premises of a new keeper (This includes any occasion when a horse is moved as part of a loan agreement – it does not only refer to changes of ownership.)
- 4) When a horse is presented at a slaughterhouse for slaughter
- 5) When a horse is sold
- 6) When a horse is used for breeding purposes

Your equine passport is a valuable to horse thieves. The equine passport should be kept securely, to prevent it being stolen with the horse. Avoid keeping it at the stable yard or in the horse lorry.

Any equine offered for sale that does not have an accurate passport should be regarded as suspicious and avoided.



National Equine Database

The National Equine Database (NED) a collaborative database between Defra and the horse industry that contains information about every equine born or resident in the United Kingdom with a UK passport. . NED contains an equine record for every passport issued by a UK Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO), which contains the name of the horse, its age, gender, height, colour, sire and dam (where provided). Everyone with a horse will have a reason to look at NED to ensure the information provided by his or her PIO is correct. www.nedonline.co.uk

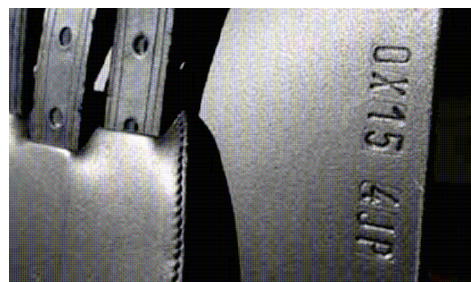


TACK SECURITY

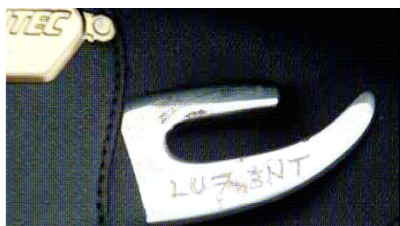
Saddles, tack and rugs are frequently stolen so they must be clearly identifiable. A visible mark will be a deterrent to thieves and any stolen items that are recovered can be returned to you. Even if it is recovered, unidentifiable property is either returned to the thief, auctioned or destroyed. Your home postcode is always the most recognizable mark to use. Work on the principle that if it is stolen and not marked you will never see it again. Even just a few rugs, head collars and grooming kits can add up to a loss of hundreds of pounds.

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.

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 possibly be done by arrangement with the local tack shops.



Saddles: Most saddles have their own unique manufacturers number but these are rarely recorded by the owner. If your saddle has a unique security number, you can register the saddle on <http://www.immobilise.com/> a free online database which helps UK police forces to identify the owner of lost & stolen goods thousands of times every day.



A leather saddle usually involves stamping on the nearside, under the flap. For synthetic saddles the near side stirrup bar is engraved. This convention is simple to follow and easy to explain to anyone checking for identifying marks.

It is also possible to have saddles electronically tagged but this can be problematic due to the amount of companies offering the service. Although this is a good secondary method, a microchip is not immediately visible and needs a scanner or database to check ownership.

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.

Rug marking: Identify them with either your home postcode or the horses' freeze brand number. Try to use a permanent method such as a two-part epoxy paint that soaks into the fabric or iron on adhesive lettering.



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. Fit the wheel clamp to a rear wheel and if possible chain the hitch to something solid.

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.

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 is used 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. Mark other parts such as breast bars, partitions and panels. The owner should keep a record of where the trailer has been marked.



The more you mark the harder job it is to remove so the deterrent is greater, as is the chance of recovery. Do not leave tack or other properties in the lorry or trailer as it is easy to steal or will simply go missing with it.