

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



YARD SAFETY AND SECURITY



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Two of the biggest threats to enjoyable horse-keeping are fire and theft. It is important to consider the consequences of such eventualities and take effective measures to guard against them.



Fire hazards

By far the most terrifying danger in the stable yard is the risk of fire. Stables have an abundance of flammable material, and fires can spread rapidly. All yards should have a strict no smoking policy and the use of unprotected (naked) flames as sources of heat should be avoided. Cobwebs should not be allowed to accumulate in and around stables, and yards and walkways should be kept free of discarded hay and bedding.

Fire procedures and equipment should be well maintained and serviced regularly. Remember, fire extinguishers are a vital piece of safety equipment and must be stored properly (not used as door stops, for example).

Action in event of a fire

- Dial 999 and ask for the fire service. The caller should give their name, address of the premises, telephone number and postcode (this is most helpful and should be displayed on all fire safety signs).
- Sound the alarm and follow evacuation procedures, first removing those horses closest to the fire and taking them to a secure place of safety, out of reach of the fire.
- Lead loose and frightened horses to a place of safety. Otherwise they may pose further danger as, rather than fleeing the fire, they may attempt to return to their stable.
- Attempt to fight small fires only if they can be immediately contained at the outset and if appropriate equipment is to hand.
- Protect human and then animal life as the priority. Buildings and equipment, though valued, can be replaced.
- Ensure that the access route is clear for the arrival of the fire service.



Theft risk

Theft of horses, rugs and equestrian equipment is a common problem for many horse keepers and is a lucrative business for thieves. However, many precautionary steps can be taken to keep all horses and equipment safe and secure.

Protecting equestrian premises

Evidence of effective security measures deters many would-be thieves. Security devices may not always prevent a theft being attempted, but certainly increase the time taken to commit a crime and therefore increase the chances of discovery.

Vulnerable equipment should be stored securely, out of obvious view. Items such as ladders and wheelbarrows that could aid thieves should also be secured or hidden from view. Gates should be padlocked securely and hinges welded or reversed, to prevent the gates being lifted off.



Sensor-operated security lights are useful, serving to warn of intruders and making their presence and activities more evident. Even when a yard is occupied, all tack and valuables should be locked away. In busy yards, thefts can occur unnoticed in broad daylight.

Doors should be of substantial construction and secured with appropriate locks. Hinges and padlock mounts should be of a reverse-folding type, covering the bolt heads and preventing them from being removed. Windows should be fitted with solid bars on the inside and window-dressings used to prevent thieves seeing in.

Burglar alarms can be useful, provided that the yard is within earshot of someone who will take notice. However, where alarms are often inadvertently set off, this can lead to subsequent complacency. Security devices which emit high-pitched sounds or release thick smoke into the room act as a second line of defence should a building be broken into.

Many horse keepers do not live on site and, in addition to asking any neighbours to be vigilant, they should aim to vary the times of their visits to the yard to prevent thieves establishing a pattern of likely arrival and departure times. The local police crime prevention officer can offer advice, ensuring that the most appropriate preventive measures are adopted.



Saddlery and rugs

All equestrian equipment should be uniquely marked, so that it can be identified, and locked away. As a preventive measure, all saddlery and portable equipment should be clearly marked with a security register number or with the owner's postcode (this method is approved and used extensively by police forces nationally). A detailed inventory of all such equipment should be kept, and saves a considerable amount of time in the event of a theft.

Security marks and postcodes can be engraved onto metal items (such as stirrup bars, clippers and generators) or embossed onto the leather using permanent dyes. Rugs can be marked with permanent markers or paint. Fabric patches, which indicate that the horse is also permanently tagged, are also helpful.

Horse boxes and trailers

Equestrian vehicles can easily be stolen from the yard and quickly moved a considerable distance. Their appearance and identity can be altered significantly by criminals in a very short period, enabling them to be sold quickly to an unsuspecting buyer.

Trailers should be secured using both hitch and wheel locks and preferably stored in a locked barn, acting as a further obstruction to would-be thieves. The description and identifying features should be recorded, to assist with identification. Many modern trailers are supplied with electronic tagging, as an additional and covert means of identification. Horse boxes and trailers, being relatively easy to break into, should not be used as storage for other equestrian equipment. As such, they would serve only to assist a thief in making off with an even greater haul.

Horse identification and thefts

Always ensure that the fencing surrounding yards and fields is secure and well maintained. To reduce the risk of horse thefts, head collars should not be left on grazing horses, as this can aid thieves to catch and handle a horse. Neither should they be left readily available (for example, hanging on fences or gates).

Thieves are less likely to take horses which have evidence of permanent identification tags – such as freeze-marks or microchips. Using prominent signs which state that the animals are permanently tagged and identifiable, is an important additional deterrent.

Freeze-marking

Freeze-marking is done by trained operators using specially chilled irons to permanently and humanely mark a horse for security purposes. It is most effective on dark-coated horses as the method destroys the pigmentation in the area. The unique number (normally four letters and numbers) shows as white hairs.



Microchipping

Microchipping is carried out by a veterinary surgeon with minimal, momentary discomfort to the horse. The chip (a digital transponder the size of a grain of rice) is inserted into the crest region of the horse's neck. The chip carries a unique number which is registered along with the animal's details, on both a central register and the horse's passport. A scanner is able to read and display the number allowing the horse to be identified when lost or stolen.

Horse 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. Hopefully, this will reduce horse thefts, as horses cannot be sold, slaughtered or otherwise passed on unless accompanied by their valid passport. The equine passport should be kept securely, to prevent it being stolen with the horse.

Action in the event of a horse being stolen

If there is evidence the horse has broken-out and strayed, or there is clear evidence of a break-in, the local police should be contacted immediately.

In the event of a theft of a security-tagged horse, the security company should be notified. Most companies have automatic procedures in place to ask auctions, sales and slaughterhouses to be vigilant.

Provide the police with an accurate description of the horse, and supply a recent photograph if possible, to assist in identification.

It is advisable to extend the search as widely and quickly as possible. In addition to informing other yards and equestrian centres in the area, there are many websites listing stolen horses which can be contacted.

Horse Watch and Farm Watch are just two of the numerous information networks spreading the word about stolen horses and related property. These networks can offer advice to victims of equestrian crime.

If the horse is insured, the insurance company should be notified. Some policies assist towards the cost of search and recovery.

Insurance

Equestrian premises and equipment should always be insured against loss, whether by fire, theft or other means. Insuring against equestrian theft will not prevent or alleviate the upset caused by the loss of a horse. It is, however, indispensable in providing financial help when these crimes do occur. Additionally, third-party liability insurance is vital for all horse owners.

Related Blue Cross publications

The following leaflets from the *All About Pets* series may be useful.

- *Safety around horses (H2)*
- *Stabling and livery (H4)*

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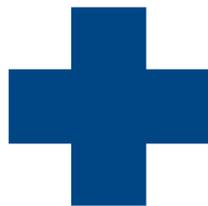
The national pet care information service

All About Pets provides expert advice, information and support for pet owners. It aims to ensure the welfare of Britain's pets by promoting responsible animal care. For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is a service of The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity, which provides practical support, information and advice for pet and horse owners. Through our network of animal adoption centres we rehome thousands of animals each year. Our hospitals provide veterinary care for the pets of people who cannot afford private vets' fees.

How you can help

The Blue Cross is a registered charity and receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of pet lovers to help support All About Pets and other vital animal welfare projects. Any contribution would be most welcome. For more information on how you can help call us on 01993 822651 or visit our website at www.bluecross.org.uk.



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All About Pets, The Blue Cross
FREEPOST NAT4336, BURFORD OX18 4BR
www.allaboutpets.org.uk

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