

Hampshire Crimestoppers is continuing the fight against rural and coastal crime by targeting would-be thieves across the county. Crimestoppers is fighting back with a campaign to stop theft of farm machinery and equipment. This may include oil, diesel, batteries, metal for its scrap value, tools, quad bikes, agricultural chemicals, tractors, and even livestock.

Rural and coastal crime costs the country a great deal - an estimated £50 million to £70 million worth of plant and agricultural machinery is stolen nationally every year, and only 5% of this stolen property is ever recovered. Stealing this valuable equipment - some of which is worth tens of thousands of pounds - may have a lasting effect on its victims who may be unable to carry on their day-to-day business without them. Thieves see it as easy to steal from outbuildings on farms or from marinas and beaches, due to limited surveillance and lack of street lighting away from urban areas.

We have a large and diverse coastline in Hampshire and Isle of Wight and this can also occasionally attract incidents of crime, anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

If you have a beach hut, do ensure it is in good repair and make sure it is secured with good quality padlocks and a solid steel bar across the front. Don't leave valuables or alcohol inside, and don't leave anything lying around that could be used to damage or enter yours or your neighbours' huts.

Likewise if you have a boat, never leave any valuables on display and keep your keys somewhere safe - ie not in the boat's ignition! Use strong padlocks or rimlocks on all your hatches, entry points and cockpit lockers.

It is very important not to buy anything suspicious 'out the back of a van', at a car boot sale or from a website. You may think you're getting a bargain on that chainsaw, or power tools, but you're actually contributing to the crime - if people didn't buy stolen goods, there would be no point the thief stealing them in the first place. You may also find yourself explaining to the Police and a Court why you thought the cheap outboard motor with no paperwork that you bought from a bloke down the pub was a genuine purchase.

Rural crime affects us all wherever we might live. We all finish up paying the price with increased insurance premiums and the potential increase in food costs. We would all soon notice if there was no milk because a local farmer could no longer operate his business!

The financial restraints of recent years have increased pressure on rural communities and this makes it more important that people who have vital knowledge have a safe and anonymous way to give information. We understand that rural communities are close-knit and trust is an important part of rural life, so people may be aware of who is committing these crimes but don't feel comfortable giving this information directly to the police. This is where Crimestoppers can help, by providing a route for people to pass on information about crimes anonymously.

If you've information about ANY crime, please call Crimestoppers on 0800 555111, or log on to www.crimestoppers-uk.org Your call is free, no one will know you called and you may earn a cash reward. You can also follow me on twitter @HantsCrimestopp

PC Simon Wright