

Crime prevention advice for caravan theft



Caravans are prime targets for thieves. It is not just new caravans that are targeted, those 2 or 3 years old are stolen and older.

Most thefts occur from storage compounds/locations, especially if they are in a rural area, or occasionally from driveways, pitches at sites or dealers premises.

When choosing somewhere to store your caravan ensure there are good security measures in place such as lighting, CCTV, effective security fencing and access systems ensuring only legitimate people have access to the caravans. Look at the Caravan Storage Site Owners Association website for advice and information - www.cassoa.co.uk/.

If you keep your caravan on your drive consider good lighting, CCTV systems, including those that alert you by mobile phone if someone comes onto your property, wheel clamps and locks as advised below, driveway alarms and an obstacle blocking your caravan such as a vehicle, locking post or other obstruction preventing it being towed or dragged from your property.

When using your caravan, ensure you immobilise it at all times, even when stopping only briefly.

Always shut and lock all doors, windows and roof lights every time you leave your caravan. If you have an awning, close the curtains and secure the entrance ensuring any valuables are taken with you or locked away safely.

Gas canisters are vulnerable to theft, ensure these are locked away in a compartment where possible.

Fit an alarm and put it on every time you leave your caravan, even if it is only for a short time.

Never leave your registration documents or security details in your caravan, these could be used by the thief.

Always take your keys with you and when not in use keep in a secure place.

Remove all personal belongings and contents from the caravan whenever it is not in use and leave curtains open, so potential thieves can see nothing of value is inside.

Take photographs of the exterior and interior of the caravan and keep them at home, either printed off or on a memory stick (in case you lose data or have problems with your computer) and keep them in a secure place along with any registration documents. Make a note of any identifying scratches, security markers, tracker information etc.

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Mark the serial or chassis number in several places inside the caravan and on accessories fitted using an ultra violet pen, permanent marker or forensic solution such as Smartwater etc. Make a note of the mark locations and keep it with the photographs and registration documents in a safe place. Record all serial numbers of items such as fridges and cookers etc. A template for doing this is on the Warwickshire Rural Watch website on the 'Advice – Record Forms' section at www.warwickshireruralwatch.co.uk.

Although some stolen caravans are recovered by the police, it is not always possible to return them to the owner as the offenders have removed all means of identification, such as VIN numbers etc, so further means should be considered.

Trackers

Tracking systems enable a caravan to be located after it has been stolen, generally using satellite technology. There are various types of system available, it is recommended to look at those designed for caravans rather than systems for general vehicles as they tend to be optimised for caravan use, taking into consideration issues such as power consumption.

There are mainly two types of tracker system. Monitored' systems, where an alarm is alerted to a monitoring centre, who can then contact the owner and/or the police. Unmonitored systems, which usually alert the owner directly, often by mobile phone text messages.

The majority of caravans recovered are due to them having an effective tracker system in place.

It is important that if you have a tracker system you know how it works so if you have your caravan stolen you can advise the police immediately and start tracking the vehicles movements/confirm its location. This includes having readily to hand the tracking companies details and any codes or reference numbers required.

Wheel Clamps

There are many different types on the market, but generally look for one which appears robust and has a lock which cannot readily be attacked by a hacksaw or drill. Any products with thin radiating arms, or exposed locks, are likely to prove vulnerable. Also bear in mind the thief will happily let down the tyre, even if it causes minor damage to the caravan, so look for a product which will not be defeated by such action.

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Wheel Locks

Similar to a wheel clamps, but wheel locks fit through the wheel and lock to the brake assembly. There are a number available, some which need to be fitted by a dealer.

Hitchlocks

A good hitchlock will deter the opportunist thief, and will offer a reasonable degree of protection on site, at roadside halts and motorway service areas, providing you use the type that can lock car and caravan together. (In the interests of safety, it is not recommended that a hitchlock is used which locks the two together when in transit.) However, they are not considered to be sufficient protection, on their own, when the caravan is in storage or at home, when a professional thief could use a chain or grappling device to pull the vehicle, making the hitch redundant.

Only products which envelop the hitch-head and completely cover the securing bolts are considered to meet the highest standard under this category. Products which leave the bolts exposed, and which have no further deterrent, allow the offender the opportunity to unbolt it and fit one they have brought with them.

Data Chip Systems

A number of companies offer data chip/electronic tagging technology. The official asset marking system for the caravan industry is CRiS (see below). Other asset marking systems exist, such as Datatag, which has official industry approval through either Sold Secure or Thatcham.

Since 1992, all touring caravans manufactured by National Caravan Council (NCC) members have been marked on their chassis and on all windows with their unique 17 digit Vehicle Identification Number and these are recorded on the CRiS database. Additionally, all new caravans manufactured by NCC members since August 1997 are electronically tagged during manufacture for added security. From 1999 this scheme was extended to allow pre-1992 and privately imported caravans to be registered in a similar way. CRiS marking can be further enhanced by using CRiS Xtra Kit (microdot), which links directly to the CRiS number.

Available to NCC members is also a Silent Tracer, which helps combat fraud through 'cloning' and 'ringing' by giving each caravan its own unique tamper-proof identity using the very latest DNA technology. For further details contact the NCC, details are on their website at www.thencc.org.uk.

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Alarms

There are many different types of caravan alarm available, with prices, sophistication and reliability varying greatly. Issues such as power consumption during periods of storage and ease of disablement should be considered. The Sold Secure Standard for caravan alarms addresses these and other important issues

Other Security Products

These include posts which are cemented into the ground so the caravan can be secured to it by a hitchlock. Others anchor the caravan chassis to the ground. High security door locks with cylindrical keys are more effective than the standard variety, but beware, if the caravan door has a window in it the thief could remove the window and operate the door handle from inside.

If you use winter wheels, replacing the road wheels for long term storage, they must be locked securely in position; otherwise an offender may bring their own wheels and swap them over. Roof lettering/numbering provides the facility to put a unique code on the caravan roof that can be spotted by the police from a helicopter, motorway bridge or road camera. The year of manufacture and CRiS number could be used.

Consider putting your postcode, number plate or other differentiating mark on the roof of your ve

