

Some thoughts on Vandalism, theft and safety tips

Vandalism, theft, fly tipping and intimidating intruders can be problems on Allotments.

The following are some tips and advice to tackle the problems and help you make your plot/site a safe and welcoming place:

The top four ways to deter crime on your allotment site are:

- **Good community relations-** Evidence shows that vandalism is rare on sites that have regular contact with people in the surrounding community. If local people do not know about the allotment site and how it might benefit them, they will, at best, ignore it.
- **A strong community on site-** Plot holders get to know each other's movements and look out for each other's plots. Our working parties are designed to encourage a sense of community.
- **A well occupied and tidy site-** a high level of activity and people gardening on site deters intruders, also making it easier to identify who is misusing the site and why. A tidy site means, kids are less likely to think they will get away with messing around and there are fewer places to hide which will deter thieves and vandals.

Other tips

- Thorny climbers are also good to grow over sheds, with the bonus if it is a fruit crop of using the space to grow food!
- Don't leave material around that is easy to set fire to, e.g. piles of drysticks and paraffin in sheds.

Young people on site

Young people do not necessarily go to allotment sites to cause damage. They may be looking for somewhere to 'hang out', away from disapproving adult eyes and control. The vandalism occurs when people are messing around, egging each other on to prove themselves or where they have found a new spot out of the way to indulge in illegal activity! Approaching young people with respect and familiarity is a powerful weapon against abuse. Today's young people are the plotholders of the future, so inform them they are in the wrong place but suggest they should come back to the site when they are ready for gardening. We have tried to involve the local school and still have an open offer for them to contact us if they wish to visit. Getting young people involved in allotment gardening gives them a sense of ownership rather than alienation so we will keep trying.

We have had intermittent problems with crime

-but much less since we had the new fence and gates. Anyone who really wants to get in can so we ask all plotholders to
- look out for suspicious behaviour.
- let the secretary know of incidents of criminal and anti-social behaviour, including the time of day, appearance of the perpetrators. This can help if a number of similar things are reported.
- notify the local Police Station of any crimes on site at the time of occurrence. You will obtain an Incident Number each time and should report this to the secretary so we can all act together when the need arises.

Dealing with suspicious intruders

- Do observe anyone that looks like they might be about to commit a crime. Do not approach an intruder if you feel that it might put you at unnecessary risk but observe from a safe distance and record it, so that you are able to report this to the police if needed.
- If you do decide to approach an intruder, stay calm and reasonable. Never fall back on empty threats of violence or discipline. The use of violence is a criminal offence, except for the use of reasonable force under immediate threat of violence.
- Trespass itself is not usually an offence that can be prosecuted in the criminal courts. Tell the intruder instead that you will report them to the police for "Breach of the Peace".

Theft

Theft, like vandalism, is usually carried out by a small number of people and happens in bouts, so act quickly if an incident occurs so that the site is not an easy target for theft.

The National Allotments Regeneration Initiative recommends the following:

- Sheds are not designed for secure storage. Do not leave valuables in them. Consider leaving the shed unlocked as often sheds are broken into but nothing taken and the damage to the shed is the major expense.
- Conceal tools. Possible hiding places include: under the shed floor, in a built-in 'secret compartment', in a bin liner in the long grass, or under a cardboard sheet / black polythene.

- Alternate where tools are hidden.
- Use old tools, or deface new ones to reduce their resale value. Painting all tools pink is remarkably effective (recommended by Northumbria police).
- Encourage ploholders to etch or mark the site postcode on all tools; if you get a spate of theft you may be able to trace it to a specific car boot sale and notify the police.
- We could organise a working party to do this if members would like a self help event?
- If you must store valuable items in a shed, store them in a strong lockable box chained to something immovable?
- If you must lock your shed use non return screws on all hinges, coach bolts or strong pad-bars and close shackle padlocks. BUT bear in mind that, in the case of a wooden shed, the thief can just saw a hole or smash a window.
- Keep a note of serial numbers of power tools and photograph valuable items.
- Our site has third party public liability insurance paid for by the council and held by the Federation of Allotment Associations. This will not cover you for theft of produce or from individual sheds.
- Never employ dangerous booby traps - they are illegal and ineffective.

Fly tipping

A tidy site is the best prevention for fly tipping as junk attracts more junk. Remove rubbish as soon as it appears. We have a local authority sign but it needs replacement. All fly tipping incident should be reported to **Fly-tipping is illegal. If you see anyone doing it, please take down their vehicle registration, and let the Council know on 01865 252900.** Designated site tips may get out of control, either due to ploholders or flytippers so we ask that ploholders keep rubbish on their plots until arrangements are made to clear it or better still take their rubbish home or to the rubbish dump.

The Gate

Often the weak point of an otherwise secure site so everyone is asked to ALWAYS LOCK THE GATE. We are trying to ensure we recall keys from past members. Ours are now expensive to cut so ploholders do not pay a substantial deposit for their keys. Barbed wire is not allowed because of numerous public liability risks. If it proves a problem we might try anti-climb paint on top of with a sign that warns people about the paint. The tarry nature, means it ruins the clothes if anyone decides to climb.