

INSTRUMENT THEFT: a growing problem



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Surveyors are falling victim to equipment theft more than ever before. The criminal world is taking a serious interest in what they do and the equipment they use; it's expensive kit. **Chris Harris** offers some tips as to what can be done to protect it

Protect yourself people! And I say this very seriously. I have no exact figures, but based on conversations and generally looking around at what's going on I'd say there are multiple thefts happening every month in the UK. You see a new one reported every few days, and they're just the ones being posted on social media.

The most appealing item of all to steal is the Total Station. The value is high but also many engineers and surveyors will use it robotically, meaning they could be stood away from the instrument itself. This happens less and less now as people become more aware of the risks.

The police recognise the issue we face but they are resource-stretched and see this as a low priority 'commercial' crime. In terms of construction equipment, a bulldozer going missing takes priority.

Deterrents

There are a few anti-theft deterrents out there (Bradlock, Wren-a-Guard) that can fix the instrument to the tripod making it much harder to physically manhandle into the back of a car. Even so, thieves very often get around these devices – normally by picking everything up together and potentially damaging the equipment, but they don't care about that. Other surveyors use chains and locks, but the same issue applies: thieves forcibly wrench the equipment away, breaking it and rendering it unusable, but

again they don't care. There are even reports of survey companies hiring security guards.

Construction kit like this is also very often tagged with asset marking material such as SmartWater. This is very useful and will prove beyond doubt that the asset is yours if you manage to find it in the future. It won't stop a theft, but criminals may choose to steer away from it in the first place

if the logo is highly visible on the product.

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The Survey Association (TSA), backed by Trimble, Leica Geosystems and Topcon, has teamed with SmartWater, the international crime fighting and crime prevention company, to set up an Intelligence Portal that will record all instances of survey equipment theft. Background photo: Igor Stevanovic / Shutterstock

Keeping track

Lastly, we have trackers. These work very well. Trimble's Locate 2 Protect (L2P) is by far the most widely used and successful tracker currently available. It can also act as a preventative measure with a large identifiable sticker being placed on the asset.

The best thing of course is that we can now recover the instruments – and sometimes bring the criminals to justice as well. One positive event at the end of 2017 was the recovery of more than 30 stolen survey instruments and accessories from a lock-up following an investigation carried out by Forest Gate Police in East London.

This successful recovery operation was assisted by one of the stolen instruments, a KOREC supplied Trimble S-Series Total Station, having the L2P (Locate to Protect) tracking technology built-in.

The tracked instrument was owned by nationwide survey company Sumo Services and was in use on an East London site during the summer when it was stolen. Following its theft, Paul Williams, Director of Sumo Services, was able to log into the

L2P portal and monitor the instrument's journey until it finally came to rest. Using Google Maps, he pinpointed its location at a storage centre while Google Street View revealed a CCTV camera covering the storage centre's entrance. Sumo immediately informed the police and called KOREC to establish its serial number.

With the L2P report, the police were able to establish when the instrument arrived at the lock-up and use the visual evidence provided by the CCTV footage to take somebody into custody.

Tamper-proof

The good thing about trackers in a Total Station (as opposed to something like a car) is that they are highly tamper-proof, being hard to physically reach and disable. The Trimble L2P chip is located deep within the instrument making it impossible for the untrained to do anything about. We have tracked and recovered instruments barely 30 minutes after they've vanished. It generally takes three hours to install or retro-fit one of these devices in a workshop that is set up to do the job.

Whatever else you decide to do to combat this significant issue, some form of equipment tracking is very worthwhile consideration.



The Trimble L2P tracking solution uses both GPS and Assisted GPS (A-GPS) to find an asset's location, both indoors and outdoors, down to the city street level address.

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