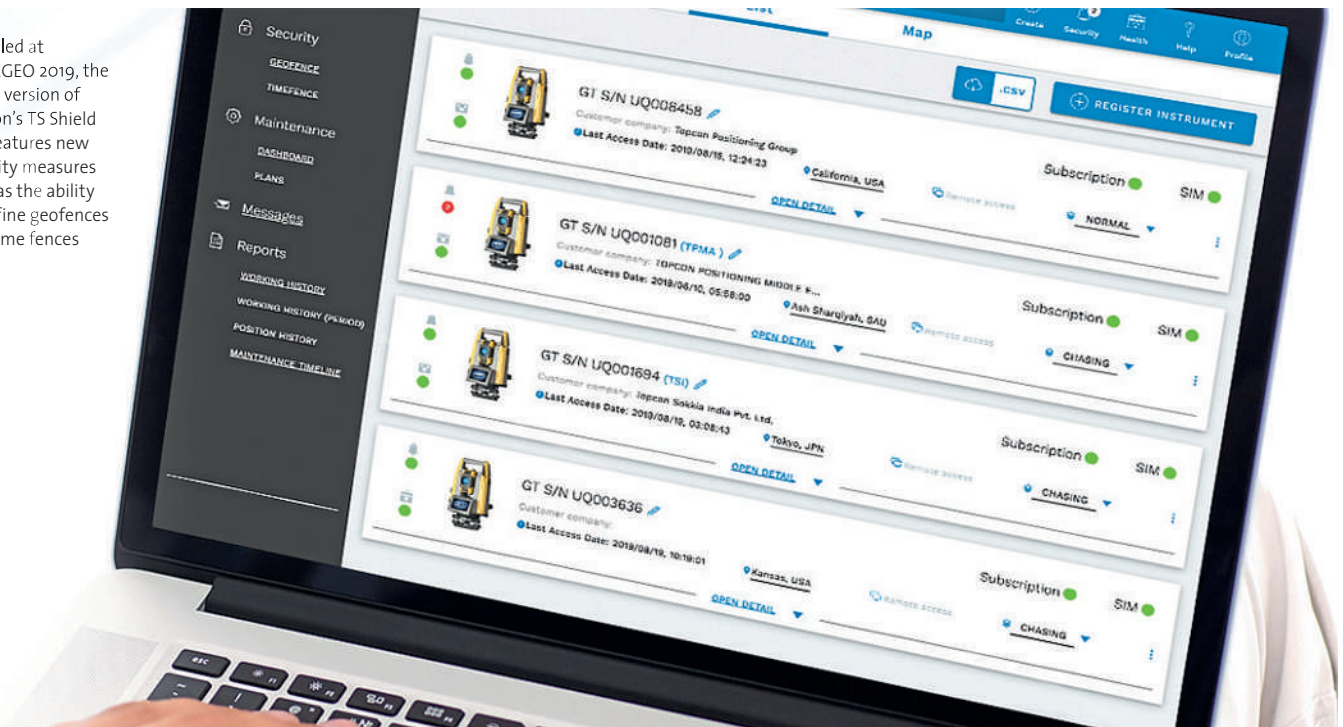


Better safe than sorry

Expensive, often poorly-protected, and with low rates of recovery, survey instruments make tempting targets for thieves. With prevention better than cure, Simon Crowhen offers some sound advice on protective measures



Unveiled at INTERGEO 2019, the latest version of Topcon's TS Shield (v3) features new security measures such as the ability to define geofences and time fences



Instrument theft is on the rise, leaving businesses in the construction industry vulnerable to opportunistic criminals. A survey of construction professionals, conducted by the Chartered Institute of Building¹, revealed that 92% had been affected by theft over the course of the year, while more than a fifth (21%) experienced theft on site on a weekly basis. In spite of this, in 2019, only 61 incidents were reported to the authorities and as a result of this low reporting rate, finding a solution to the problem is difficult and the scale of the issue may not even be fully understood.

Tempting target

Expensive equipment and the low rate of lost and stolen instrument recovery places the construction industry firmly on thieves' agendas, with total stations, in particular, targeted due to their high value. Advanced technology allowing users to operate total stations from a distance also leaves the devices vulnerable and gives thieves more opportunity to take them. The low rate of instrument recovery allows thieves to escape punishment and acts as a deterrent for people when it comes to reporting incidents.

Sites also usually do not take measures to deter thieves, with many companies choosing not to pay for expensive extra security, such as CCTV, bright lighting or even security guards. Preventative efforts, like padlocks on tripods, are also often not substantial enough to stop thieves.

Tracking assets

In an ideal world, construction professionals would know where all of their tools are and would be able to monitor them remotely, providing extra peace of mind that, should

equipment be stolen, it could easily be tracked. Certain tracking technology already exists to monitor Total Stations, whereby construction professionals can manage their equipment online, tracking on which project the Total Station is employed and how many hours it has been used.

Topcon's TSshield 3.0, for example, provides remote security for construction assets with more advanced features for complete remote management. Geofences are now a possibility with today's technology, allowing users to draw a map of construction sites and ensure that if equipment is removed from that area, it is locked so that it becomes unusable. Time fences are also a reality, meaning Total Stations are shut down outside their required hours of use, thus making them unusable for thieves.

Working together

The Survey Association, the trade body for commercial survey companies in the UK, and crime prevention company, Smart Water, have formed an alliance to analyse and follow up on incidents of instrument theft². Recent figures collected by the partnership show that the average cost of reported equipment stolen in 2019 was £18,000 but, with many incidents going unreported, the true cost to the industry remains unknown. With instrument theft a growing issue, the construction industry needs to make sure it is taking the appropriate measures to protect equipment in order to defend against massive losses.

Rachel Tyrrell, Secretary General at The Survey Association, explained: "You don't have to be a TSA member to report equipment theft through our portal. The flow of comprehensive, quality data helps

to highlight the UK's crime hot spots to the national intelligence unit of the police, ultimately leading to arrests, the recovery of stolen instruments and disruption of organised criminal activity."

With new breakthroughs in instrument security helping to reduce crime rates on site, technological innovation is also key to tackling the problem. Construction professionals need to plan ahead when it comes to on site security to ensure that equipment is not left vulnerable and easily accessible for criminals, and technology is available to help. The construction industry needs to work together to innovate and find new solutions to ensure that projects are not disrupted and money lost as a result of opportunistic thieves.

To report a piece of stolen equipment to the TSA, visit: www.tsa-uk.org/equipment-theft.

For more information about Topcon's technology, visit: www.topconpositioning.com/en-gb.

¹ <https://policy.ciob.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Crime-in-the-Construction-Industry.pdf>
² <https://www.tsa-uk.org.uk/equipment-theft/>



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