

Commercial theft

As vehicle crime continues to rise, John Challen looks at measures operators can take to minimise their chances of becoming one of the victims

More than one million small business have been targeted by criminals in the past two years, with vehicle thefts and break-ins accounting for 10% of cases. Recent evidence from the now disbanded Truckpol arm of the police (the crime statistics, information and trend monitoring office) revealed that 4,417 freight crimes were reported in 2011. From these, load theft (including fuel) and attempted load theft accounted for the majority (69%).

One unnamed local authority fell victim when someone claiming to be from the local police called, telling it that a backhoe loader had been stolen. The council, believing the fraudster, not only failed to report the crime, but also confirmed that a tracker was fitted – ostensibly so that the ‘police’ could locate the vehicle, but actually so the thief knew to get rid of it. When the police were finally informed, they quickly recovered the tracker – from a ditch. It wasn’t until much later that the vehicle was found – in a container, for shipping, with its roof sawn off.

Clearly, operators and fleet managers need to stay one step ahead, but what’s the best approach? Security systems, alarms and CCTV can only go so far in protecting fleets. Fortunately, there are other options for fleet managers.

Gone missing

Should thieves bypass a company’s security and successfully take a vehicle, experience suggests that tracking technology can be worth the initial investment. One stolen pick-up truck belonging to Nottinghamshire County Council was intercepted by police forces from South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire within 30 minutes of the alarm being raised.

The rapid response was possible, thanks to a Thatcham Category 5 satellite tracking device, from Masternaut Three X. During the pursuit, support staff at Masternaut Three X increased the tracking frequency to speed the recovery. As the vehicle was recovered undamaged, the council saved itself any repair or replacement costs, and the inconvenience associated with temporarily operating with a reduced fleet.

Unfortunately, many operators are not so lucky. Figures from Crimestoppers suggest that no fewer than half of the



3,000 HGVs stolen every year in the UK are never recovered. Factor in a higher rate of thefts around loads, fuel and valuable vehicle components, and crimes against commercial vehicles are an expensive problem.

One preventive solution has been developed by truck parts and consumables supplier HGV Direct. Its four-camera, on-vehicle safety system improves on some others in the market by providing a 24/7 recording. Managing director Simon Smedley explains that, while three of the cameras focus on monitoring blind spots, the fourth can be set up as a security device, capturing images of thieves approaching the vehicle and tampering with the load or siphoning off fuel.

“Our system offers a 360° view around the vehicle, and a means of protecting all aspects of road, load, vehicle and driver safety,” comments Smedley.

And finally to TruckMinder, which has proved popular with fleets since its introduction at this year’s CV Show. With catalytic converters and the like costing around £1,000 to replace, fleet managers are obviously keen to protect them. TruckMinder does so via a sensor mounted directly on the diesel particulate filter (DPF).

Any attempt to cut or short circuit cables, or to disconnect the battery, triggers an alarm. Fitting a GSM auto-dialling modem is optional, but allows the system to send alert text messages to assigned phones. False alarms are prevented, according to TruckMinder, as the patented sensor recognises and rejects ‘non-threatening’ events. 