

Information sheet No. 8



Security tips

Livestock

Have an accurate description of your horse or pony. Write down details of horse's height, colour and any distinguishing features; take photos of the animal from both sides, front and rear. Update the details regularly. Use the Horse and Equipment Identification form enclosed in your membership pack supplied by Thames Valley Horsewatch.

Freezebranding is a popular permanent method of making horses more identifiable, allowing the horse to be traced back to its owner if stolen. The process is quick. The branding iron is cooled in liquid nitrogen and applied to the skin. Pigment cells on the skin are destroyed and the hairs grow back white and stay that way for life. The irons are applied to a greys skin for a little longer. The hair follicle is destroyed leaving a bald patch in the shape of the numbers and letters. This does not cause the horse any discomfort, but do not forget the sun tan cream when rungs are first removed after winter!!

Microchipping is an alternative to freezebranding. A chip the size of a grain of rice is inserted in the ligament in the animal's neck with a hypodermic needle. Each chip holds basic information and is registered on a computerised system. When a scanner is passed over the horse, this information can be matched with the owner's details. Until recently there was no outward evidence on a microchipped horse, but now the horse can also be freezebranded with a small symbol indicating the existence of the microchip.

However, it is recommended that both microchipping and freezebranding is carried out as it is easier to read white numbers on a horse's back, particularly if it is upset, than try to find a microchip reader in the first instance. By law now, all equines born after July 2009 have to be passported and microchipped.

Hoof branding is another approach. The owner's postcode is burnt onto the horse's hoof. Although highly visible at first, it must be renewed approximately every six months as the hoof grows.

Put signs on your fences stating the horses are security-marked. This can deter a thief but don't get complacent; a thief may take the risk if the animal can be easily removed from the premises.

Fields and yards

What type of gates do you have, and can they be lifted off their hinges? To secure gates use a close-shackled padlock and a pad bar rather than a chain, which can be cut through easily. Thieves will watch a yard to assess the movements of owners. Vary your timings to make life more difficult for them.

Equipment

Security mark all your equipment. Horsewatch co-ordinators can attend tack-marking sessions. It should be marked with your postcode and any unusual and/or expensive items should also be photographed. The Thames Valley

Horsewatch Horse and Equipment Identification form also provides an area to record these details.

Tackrooms

Windows are a common point of access, so put bars on the inside. Doors can be secured with padlocks, but make sure the hinges cannot be unscrewed - a burglar will not think twice about removing the door.

Transport

Trailers are also easy targets, which need to be immobilised, but in such a way they can be accessed in an emergency. Consider using Datatag marking of your trailer. Wheel clamps and hitchlocks are popular, and the latest security measure is to apply your postcode to the trailer roof. A form to order your letters is available to download from www.thamesvalleyhorsewatch.org.uk.