

The Armorgard

# guide to preventing tool theft from vans

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...industry insights from Armorgard

# preventing tool theft from vans

## » Why you should read this

In the UK a van is broken into every 23 minutes. Businesses and individuals across the UK are losing huge amounts of money as sophisticated thieves target vans for the tools inside. Tool theft has been around for decades, but in recent years the scale of the theft from tradesmen and business owners has reached epidemic proportions, increasing by as much as 40% since 2016.

The cost of tool theft can be devastatingly expensive for tradesmen. Tools will need to be replaced whilst income could be at a complete standstill. Contracts could be lost and customer relationships may need to be repaired.

## Keep your tools away from the thieves

Tool theft has been around for decades, but in recent years the scale of the theft from tradesmen and business owners has reached epidemic proportions, increasing by as much as 40% since 2016.



## The facts

Tool theft is taking place up and down the country. Tradesmen from Yorkshire and The Midlands appear to be the most at risk of tool theft, according to Insurance broker, Simply Business. In 2023, there was 44,514 tool thefts reported to the police, which is up by 5% from 2022.

A number of big cities feature in the 10 worst hit areas – including Sheffield, Birmingham, Bristol, and Nottingham. The top ten towns and cities for tool theft (by number of claims in 2017) are:

- 1. London
- 2. Sheffield
- 3. Birmingham
- 4. Leicester
- 5. Chelmsford
- 6. Tunbridge Wells
- 7. Bristol
- 8. Nottingham
- 9. Northampton
- 10. Reading



## The top ten towns and cities for tool theft



## The law

The maximum penalty for theft is seven years' imprisonment, but sentencing is a matter for judges, who will consider the circumstances of the offence and any mitigating and aggravating factors, including financial harm and the impact of the theft.

Investigations and enquiries are often limited and unsuccessful. If stolen tools are recovered, they rarely get returned to their owners because most items have no individual identification marks on them.

When insurance claims are successful, the delay between making the claim and receiving the pay-out can be sufficient to put tradesmen out of business.

Criminals will usually try to sell on stolen equipment swiftly to avoid the risk of being caught in possession of the goods. Many will use online forums to sell tools at a reduced cash price.

Many tradesmen are calling for tougher penalties for thieves. They also want stricter guidelines and laws on the selling of second-hand tools. There are many campaigns in place to raise awareness of the problem, provide peer support and to lobby the Government. #beatthethief



**Many tradesmen are calling for tougher penalties for thieves**

**What are the issues?**

- investigations and enquiries are often limited and unsuccessful
- tradesmen are out of business before receiving a payout
- stolen tools rarely get returned to their owners

## What you can do

We've put together a comprehensive check list of things you could do to keep your van and its contents safer and more secure. Many of these are simple precautions that don't cost anything, but require a little care when leaving your van.

We've rated our recommendations by the ease of implementing them, and we've also tried to give you an indication of likely costs where applicable.

Task	Difficulty rating	Cost
Lock van and close windows	Very easy	£0
Park your van tightly in a corner	Easy	£0
Park your van in a bright, well-lit area	Average	£0 - £100
CCTV	Difficult	£100 - £400
Van stickers	Easy	£10
Remove tools overnight	Average	£0
Keep receipts and an inventory of your tools	Average	£0
Mark tools with a UV pen	Easy	£5- £10
Alarms	Average	£200
Advanced locks	Difficult	£20 - £350
Van lock protection plates	Average	£350 - £450
Van box	Easy	£150
Insurance	Average	£100 - £200 p/a



**Lock your van, and close the windows**

**Lock your van, and close the windows (very easy, £0)**

Over half of all tool thefts are reckoned to be opportunist thefts. By locking up properly, no matter whether you're leaving the van for a minute or ten minutes, you're halving the chances of being victimized.

**Park your van tightly in a corner to block access to the rear and side doors (easy, £0)**

Most vans come with a single sliding door on the passenger's side, so if you park it very tightly in a corner, the rear and side doors are totally inaccessible.

**Park your van in a bright, well-lit area (average, £0 - £100)**

Keeping your van in a well-lit area is a big thief deterrent, making any suspicious activity very obvious. If you always park your van at home overnight and don't have outside lighting, you can fit a 3000 Lumen 38W LED flood light with a motion sensor for as cheaply as £40. Make sure you mount it well out of reach!

**CCTV (difficult, £100 - £400)**

If you have a bright PIR floodlight on your house, it should be relatively easy to install a CCTV system near it. As with flood lights, make sure any CCTV camera is mounted as high as possible to make it harder to access.

You can get a complete home system with 4 cameras for as little as £260. Alternatively, a single camera that records direct to a memory card for around £120 can also be installed directly into your van by specialist installers such as TVG.

**Van stickers (easy, £10)**

Whilst van stickers saying “no tools left in this van overnight” may invite thieves to break in, adding stickers that mention the security of your tools - such as advertising a strong alarm system - can be successful. Armorgard provide stickers that say “My tools are secured with Armorgard”. Another trick that’s gaining popularity is to advertise yourself as something other than a contractor – a big magnetic sign saying “Florists” or “Butchers” on the side of your van isn’t going to attract much attention from tool thieves!



**Van stickers  
(easy, £10)**



**If possible, remove the most expensive tools overnight  
(average, £0)**

It's generally harder to break into a building than a van. However, we appreciate that removing your tools every night can be hard work. At the very least, consider removing the three most expensive pieces of kit when you leave it for any length of time.

**Keep receipts, pictures and an inventory of your cargo and tools  
(average, £0)**

Tool theft victims often say that they wish they had proof of the tools that were in their van, because insurance companies will rarely accept less than hard evidence. Keeping a file of the receipts, keeping an up-to-date inventory of all your tools and regularly taking photos of them in your van all help to create a solid insurance claim. It will take a little time but cost you nothing.

**Mark tools with a UV pen (easy, £5 - £10)**

The police recover thousands of stolen goods every year: but this work is wasted if they can't positively identify the owners. Goods are only returned if owners can provide proof that the goods are theirs. Using a UV pen is the most reliable and simplest way of doing this – it leaves an invisible mark that can only be detected using UV light. You can pick up a pack of 10 on Amazon for less than £10.

**Alarms (average, £200)**

Van alarm systems are becoming increasingly popular as a strong line of defence. Systems like the Smart 360 can be purchased from £200, and are advertised to call your phone within 8 seconds of a break in, making it a fast and efficient way to be alerted of any problems.



**Alarms  
(average, £200)**



**Advanced locks (difficult, £20 - £350)**

Slamlocks – these locks are designed to lock the door securely every time it's closed, hence the name. Slamlocks can be fitted to most vans, and can be purchased from sites such as Vanlocks.co.uk. The best slamlocks to have are those that are vehicle specific and inset into the van door. Slamlocks can also be keyed alike.

Deadlocks – deadlocks don't have a spring loaded bolt, and therefore need a key to physically turn the internal cylinder, which in turn moves the bolt – making it a very difficult lock to pick. When a 5-lever deadlock is paired with anti-drill plates, you get one of the most secure locks on the market, and the only one that is usually accepted by insurance companies for house doors. Companies such as Van Lock Store will professionally fit deadlocks on your van for you, or you can find tutorials on YouTube that show you how to do it yourself.

**Van lock protection plates (average, £100 - £450)**

These are plates that cover the area around the lock with an additional layer of reinforcement, making locks harder to break or pick. These can be purchased from sites such as vanlocks.co.uk and are usually van specific.

**Van box (easy, £150)**

There are several brands of van box available on the market that can upgrade your tool security. It's worth choosing a box that is strongly built and with good reviews. Features such as anti-jemmy design, reinforcements, deadlocks and thick steel are all features to look out for when choosing the perfect van box. Van boxes to avoid are those that are secured with a padlock, as most padlocks can be twisted open with a good jemmy. For about £150, you can pick up a new Armorgard TuffBank which is a good size to fit most vans and trucks and fits all the criteria – or go one better and get a StrongBank, which is the best of the best!

**Insurance (average, £100 - £200)**

Are you insured? Check your insurance documents thoroughly as insurances will usually only cover you in very specific circumstances. Make sure you are familiar with the small print, and do everything you can to make sure you're covered at all times. For instance, most insurance companies won't accept a claim for stolen tools if your van wasn't locked at the time. If you feel the conditions of your insurance are unrealistic, you could try to renegotiate or find a better provider that covers you for what you need. You can get insurance for around £150 per annum to cover your van and tools up the value of £10,000 – we recommend speaking to a broker such as Biba or Simply Business who will go over your requirements and put you in touch with the best provider.

**Equipment that can help**

**tuffbank™**

Our best-selling secure site storage solution with security rating – gold.



**oxbox™**

The simple and dependable solution for securing your tools and equipment.



**trekdror™**

These steel tool drawers offer the ultimate in versatility, with removable partitions to keep everything tidy.



## Equipment that can help

### tuffstor cabinet™

The ultra-tough cabinet that keeps your equipment organised and accessible.



### strimmersafe vault™

The ultra-tough secure vault for storing strimmers and long handled tools.



- <https://www.electricaldirect.co.uk/product/luceco-slimline-38w-5000k-led-pir-floodlight-blacksilver-552401?nosto=productpage-nosto-2>
- <https://www.screwfix.com/p/swann-swdvk-816004-uk-8-channel-security-system-4-cameras-5-pcs/9089t>
- <https://www.amazon.co.uk/TriVision-Waterproof-Definition-Weatherproof-Megapixel/dp/B016TFC6R4?th=1>
- <https://www.thevehiclegroup.com/vehicle-cctv/>
- <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Safehaus-Permanent-Ultraviolet-Marker-Pack/dp/B004Q5APSM>
- <https://smart360.co/>
- <https://www.vanlocks.co.uk/slamlocks/>
- <http://vanlockstore.co.uk/fitting-installation>
- <https://www.vanlocks.co.uk/armaplate/>
- <https://www.biba.org.uk/>
- <https://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/>

### » Resources and further help

If you become a victim of tool theft, here's a few things you should consider doing:

- Report your tool theft to the Police straight away, so they can try and track down the thieves: if you have CCTV footage or other evidence they will want to have a record. This also means you should be notified when they have any updates or if they find any goods that match those you lost.
- Notify your insurance company as soon as possible. Sometimes insurance companies need to know about the incident within a few days for your claim to be valid, so it's important to let them know straight away.
- Check out any local second hand tool shops, Cash Converters, local car boot sales and so on – thieves are lazy and don't often travel far to get rid of their goods.
- Keep an eye on eBay, Gumtree, Facebook Marketplace and other second hand online selling sites – if you see your tools appear, you can raise a ticket with the customer service team for that site.
- Keep an eye on police updates. Most county police constabularies use Flickr to post photos of recovered goods – if you recognise anything as your own you can contact the police on 101 to claim it. Google your county's police website to find out how they advertise recovered goods.
- Post images of the tools lost online, on social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, and use popular hashtags such as #vantheft #tooltheft #vansecurity #vancrime #stolen to make your post easily searchable. If people see the tools you have lost they might contact you or report it to the police. It also makes it very hard for thieves to sell your tools if people can easily recognise them as stolen.
- Don't feel isolated – there are plenty of people that have joined forces on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to fight back at van thieves – here's a couple of groups you should consider joining: Tradesmen against thieves <https://www.facebook.com/groups/925067357623867/> and Van Security Talk Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tradesmansvantheftawareness/>

Disclaimer: by linking to other sites within this article we are by no means recommending or sponsoring these sites. Links to sites are used purely as an illustration and should be treated as such.

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For further information and help on this topic and to find out about training options please call 023 9238 0280 or email [sales@armorgard.co.uk](mailto:sales@armorgard.co.uk)



[armorgard.co.uk](http://armorgard.co.uk)