TRADESPEOPLE AGAINST TOOL THEFT

AN ON THE TOOLS WHITEPAPER

On The Tools

SB Simply Business

Supported by: JEWSON

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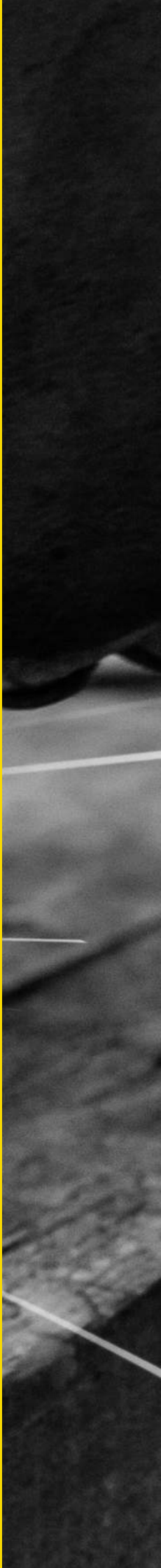


TRADESPEOPLE
AGAINST TOOL THEFT

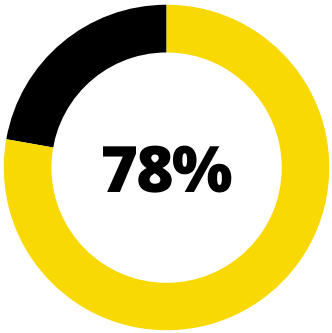
78%

of tradespeople surveyed had their tools stolen.

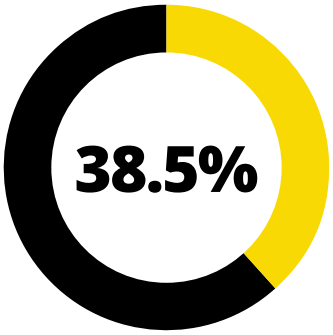
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tradespeople Against Tool Theft white paper was created to explore and highlight the realities of UK tradespeople who have been impacted by tool theft.

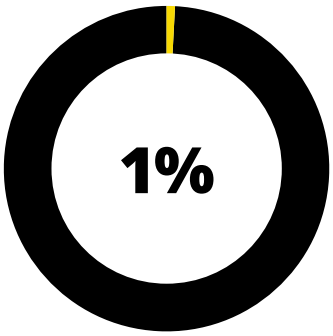
This report uses information gathered from in-depth interviews, live focus groups, and targeted surveys to incorporate the real-life experiences and opinions of tradespeople, consumers, construction industry bodies, and construction brands who have been impacted by tool theft.



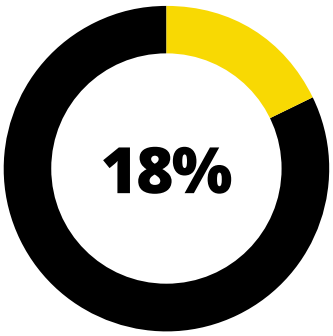
of tradespeople have had their tools stolen.[1]



of tradespeople have had their tools stolen outside their home from their van.[2]



of tradespeople fully recovered their stolen tools.[3]



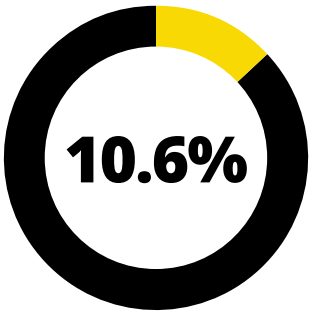
of tradespeople who reported having their tools stolen are from the South East.[4]

Tool theft is rarely a one-off issue. From our research, we know that the average UK tradesperson is likely to have their tools stolen at least once over the course of their career.[5] Some trades appear to be more desirable targets for thieves, with 30% of carpenters having their tools stolen four times or more.[6] (See PART 1: Scale to find out more.)

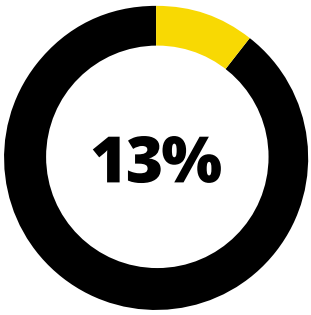
ECONOMIC IMPACT

When you consider the significant financial impact that the crime can have upon a tradesperson, it's clear that something needs to be done to minimise and ultimately eliminate the issue. On The Tools found that the average UK tradesperson is likely to have between £1,000 and £5,000 worth of tools stolen from them in just one tool theft incident. This report also uncovered that self-employed tradespeople (68%) are 38% more likely than employed tradespeople (30%) to have their tools stolen.[7]

It's not just covering the cost of stolen tools that a tradesperson needs to think about.[8]



of tradespeople told us that they had to take time off work or decline work while they found new equipment. [9]



of tradespeople had to pay for damage to repair their vehicle.[9]

It's reasonable to consider whether the current UK cost of living crisis will exacerbate the rates of tool theft in the country; 58% of tradespeople thought that it was very likely that the cost of living crisis would increase the likelihood of their tools being stolen.[10] (See PART 2: Economic Impact to find out more.)

THE STOLEN TOOLS MARKET

On Tuesday 27th April 2021, a motion for leave to bring in a Bill was presented in the House of Commons. The Bill proposed a requirement for persons selling second-hand tools online to show the serial numbers of those tools in searchable advertisement text, and for connected purposes.[11] This Bill, as it stands, has not become legislation: leaving the tradespeople of the UK unsupported against the crime of tool theft.

Consumer awareness around the crime is high, with

70%
of consumers

believing that the average tradesperson has had their tools stolen once or more during the past year.[12] Yet, according to our research, 23% of consumers purchased second-hand and/or refurbished tools without making any checks in 2022.[13] However, it's not just consumers who may be participating in the stolen tools market; 20% of tradespeople reported that they also purchase second-hand and/or refurbished tools. (See PART 3: The tools market to find out more.)

MENTAL HEALTH

Experiencing tool theft can be a traumatising experience for many. When we asked UK tradespeople who had previously experienced the crime to tell us how often they worried about it, 68% told us that they worried about tool theft daily.[14] In addition, **39% of all tradespeople surveyed agreed that having tools stolen has had a 'strong impact" on their mental health**, with the figure significantly higher for self-employed tradespeople specifically.[15] In the Tradespeople Against Tool Theft white paper, On The Tools examines the gaps in the support needed to accommodate the well-being needs of those impacted by tool theft, and makes recommendations to fill in these gaps. (See PART 4: Mental Health to find out more.)

CASE STUDIES

Since the crime of tool theft is so widespread, it is true that similarities can be drawn between the experiences of different tradespeople. Yet, in the interest of comprehensiveness, individual stories and exceptions should be considered. For this reason, first-person accounts in the form of case studies have also been included in the Tradespeople Against Tool Theft white paper. (See PART 5: Case Studies to find out more.)

PUNISHMENTS

When exploring the issue of tool theft in the UK, the police force should play an integral role. However, **almost a quarter (22.67%) of tradespeople did not report the crime of tool theft to the police after their experience.**[16] For those who did report the crime, only 6% were satisfied or very satisfied with how the police handled their case.[17] Owing to the severity of the implications of tool theft in comparison to general theft, 73% of tradespeople surveyed agreed that tool theft should carry a more severe penalty than general theft.[18] (See PART 6: Punishments to find out more.)

SUPPORT

Besides the police, there are a number of systems that UK tradespeople can use to get support in the aftermath of tool theft. These include counselling to mitigate their emotional welfare, and insurance policies to compensate for their financial losses. However, from our research, we know that 83% of UK tradespeople did not have tool insurance in place at the time of their experience(s) with tool theft.[19] (See PART 7: Support to find out more.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations made by On The Tools regarding tool theft can be separated into those to reduce tool theft and those to support tradespeople. An example of a recommendation made to reduce tool theft is regarding innovation by tool manufacturers to enable better security. (See PART 8: Conclusions to find out more.)

A WORD FROM
OUR CEO

"Tool theft is crippling our industry. It's an issue that impacts an immense proportion of UK tradespeople and can no longer be ignored.

The Tradespeople Against Tool Theft white paper was created to reveal the widespread consequences of this crime, from the financial impacts to the emotional consequences and more.

I am hopeful that by distributing this white paper to all corners of the construction industry and beyond, we can encourage the issue to be taken as seriously as it should be, improving the situation for UK tradespeople once and for all. I would also like to thank the industry sponsors and supporters of this research for your invaluable contributions."

Lee Wilcox
Chief Executive Officer
On the Tools

ABOUT TH

INTRODUCTION

The Tradespeople Against Tool Theft white paper was created to explore the realities of UK tradespeople who have had their tools stolen.

The research question considered throughout the report is: "What should be done about tool theft?" By identifying the scale and impact of the crime, the white paper makes informed recommendations to reduce the issue.

On The Tools is the UK's largest and most engaged construction community with over 6 million followers. We entertain and empower tradespeople. Through our mission of 'connecting construction,' we engage with our self-made community every day to understand their thoughts, opinions, and experiences.

METHODOLOGY

To answer the question, "What should be done about tool theft?" the Tradespeople Against Tool Theft white paper followed a mixed-method approach to its research.

The methodology included:

- Three qualitative focus groups
- Qualitative interviews with three industry charities:

- A quantitative study of tradespeople (sample size 2,078)
- Consumer research via YouGov (sample size 2,070)

Please see appendix for a comprehensive overview of the report's methodology.

IE REPORT

RESEARCH AIMS

To grant a comprehensive overview of the issue of tool theft, the data collected from the methodology is compounded in the report by external research, from sources including:

- GOV UK
- The Metropolitan Police
- The Office for National Statistics

Please see the bibliography for more information about our sources.

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SCALE

INTRODUCTION

The Metropolitan Police recorded that 21,630 tool theft offences and 6,839 van theft offences were carried out in the UK between 2020 and 2021.[20] Additionally, Simply Business saw 1,271 tool theft insurance claims being made by tradespeople in the same period.[21]

In comparison, the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW) estimated that 6 million total incidents of general thefts occurred between 2020 and 2021.[22] This approximates that tool theft in the UK accounts for 0.004% of all general theft.

However, the actual number of instances of tool theft is sure to be much higher than the number of tool thefts that are reported to the police. When we asked tradespeople to tell us whether they reported their experience(s) of tool theft to the police, 22.67% told us that they did not report the crime.[23]

> ***"When my tools were stolen, there was no CCTV around. I did go knocking door-to-door to see if they had cameras outside their houses, but I was unfortunately left in the lurch. I spoke to the police and asked if they wanted to come by to do any fingerprinting. They said, 'sorry, but it's an open and shut case.' Nobody saw or heard anything."***

When tool thefts are reported to the police, the chances of recovery are minimal. We asked tradespeople to tell us whether their stolen tools were recovered following their experience(s) with tool theft.
(See parts 5 and 6 for more information about the police force and tool theft.)

(See PART 5 and PART 6 for more information about the police force and tool theft.)

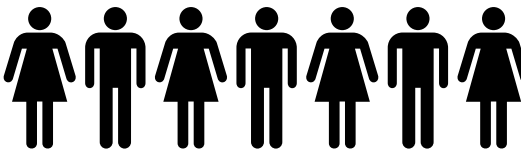
HOW MANY TRADESPEOPLE ARE AFFECTED BY TOOL THEFT?

It is common for tradespeople to be significantly affected by tool theft without having their own tools stolen, for example, those who witness a tool theft taking place, or those who work for someone who has had their tools stolen. For this reason, the number of tradespeople who are affected by tool theft can be anticipated to be considerably higher than the number of instances of tool theft.

We asked tradespeople to tell us about their experiences of tool theft.

> ***"I was working for someone who had their tools stolen when we were putting in a garden room. We lost three or four days trying to sort stuff out and replace the deadlocks on the van. It probably cost him £1,000 or more. I know lots of people in the trade who have had their tools stolen."***

A further 5% of tradespeople witnessed others having their tools stolen, while 17% have never had their tools stolen.[25]



78% **of tradespeople have had their tools stolen.**

THE MOST AT-RISK TRADESPEOPLE

While some tradespeople use mainly hand tools to get the job done, others rely upon expensive specialist equipment for their trade. The variety of tools – and their value – is well-known among the construction industry and the thieves that want to take them.

According to our research, the trade with the most experiences of tool theft are carpenters.

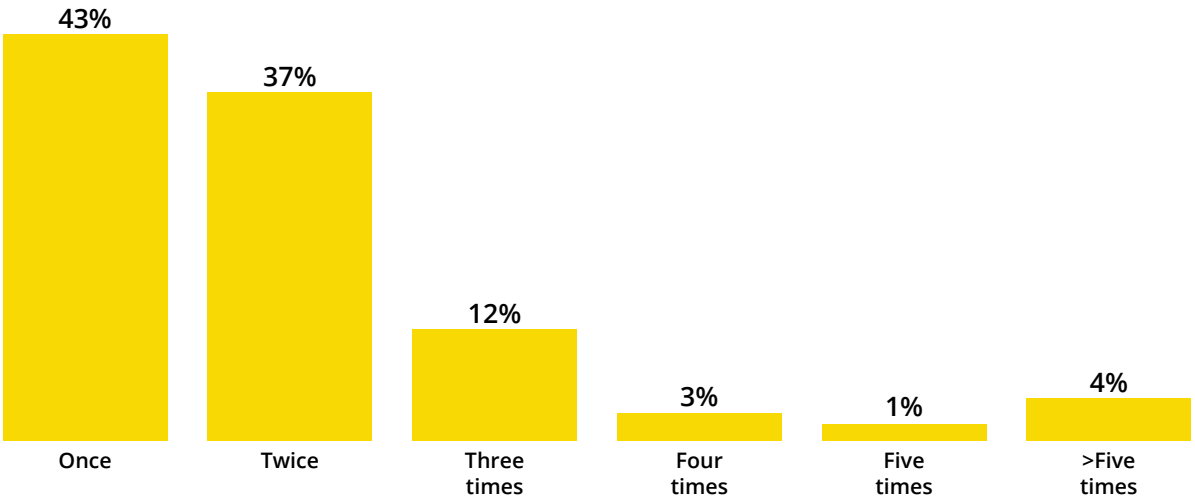
30% **of carpenters have had their tools stolen four times or more.**

THE FREQUENCY OF TOOL THEFT

There were 2.6 million incidents of general theft estimated by the TCSEW for the year ending March 2022, a decrease of 20% from the previous year.[27]

Despite the decrease in overall thefts, more thieves seem to be targeting tools from tradespeople every year. The Metropolitan Police reports that from 2020 to 2021, the number of offences where tools were stolen rose from 10,578 to 11,052, an increase of 4.5%.[28] Similarly, Simply Business reports that from 2020 to 2021, the tool insurance claims made by tradespeople rose from 615 to 656, an increase of 6.7%.[29]

When we asked tradespeople to tell us how many instances of tool theft they had experienced, 43% of tradespeople said they have had their tools stolen once; 37% have had their tools stolen twice, and 4% have had their tools stolen more than five times.



Appendix 1Bii) Number of times UK tradespeople have had their tools stolen.

“Every trade now carries five or six figures with them. Look at what decorators carry – they probably have ten grand worth of kit, nowadays. I think that sign-written vans are going to be more susceptible because it says exactly what’s in there.”

WHERE TOOL THEFT HAPPENS THE MOST BY LOCATION

According to CrimeRate, the UK regions with the highest general crime rates per 1,000 residents in 2022 are Bristol (106), West Yorkshire (104), Tyne and Wear (92) and the West Midlands (91). The UK regions with the lowest general crime rates per 1000 residents in 2022 are Staffordshire (29), Rutland (35), Cornwall (43), and Down (45).[30]

According to Simply Business, the most tool theft insurance claims were made by tradespeople living in London, the Midlands, and the North East of England, and the least tool theft insurance claims were made by tradespeople from Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.[31]

"Once, I saw a list of the most dangerous cities in Europe in terms of violent crime, and Coventry and Birmingham were in the top five. I live a spitting distance from both of those places. You might think the place where you live is a lovely town, but, unfortunately, so do the thieves. I couldn't speak about where the most at-risk place is, but I do know that it is very common here."

"Tool theft seems to be hitting the length and breadth of the country. I think the thieves travel well. In a 50-mile radius around where I live in Essex, it's always the same technique. These guys seem to mooch around the country; I think it's widespread."

We asked tradespeople to tell us from which area of the UK they had their tools stolen. The area with the highest rate of tool theft is the South East;

18% of tradespeople report having their tools stolen from the South East.

The area with the lowest rate of tool theft, according to our research, is Northern Ireland; only 1.6% of tradespeople report having their tools stolen from this area.

	(%)
South East	17.98
London	17.39
West Midlands	10.50
North West	10.17
South West	10.10
East Midlands	8.79
Yorkshire / Humber	8.79
Scotland	5.84
North East	4.72
Wales	3.81
Ireland	1.64
Other	0.26

Appendix 1B-vi) UK areas where tradespeople's tools were stolen from.

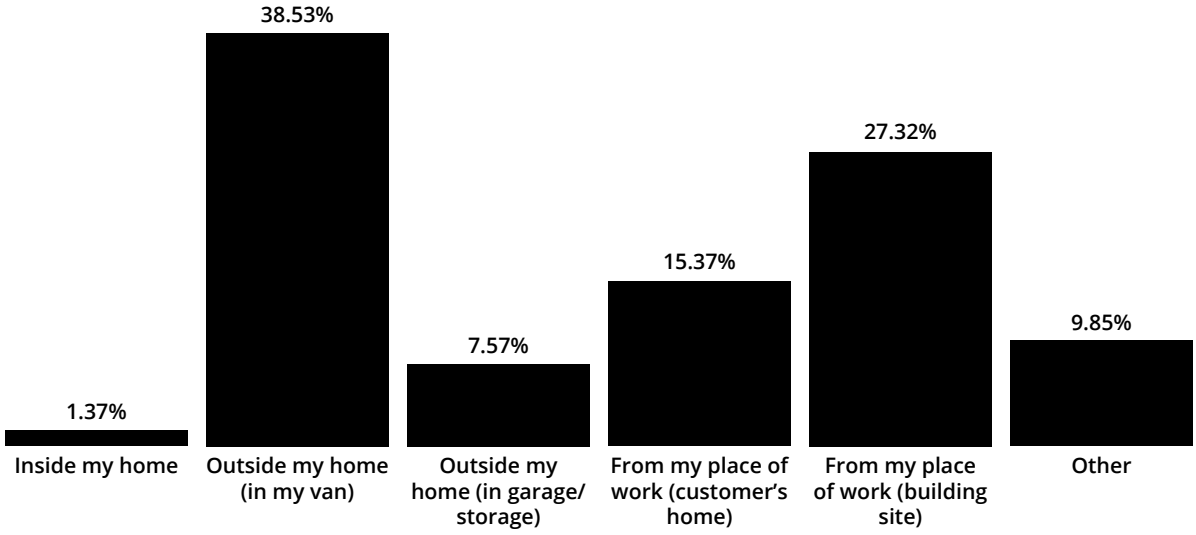
THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING TOOL THEFT

There can be gaps in some insurance policies that leave tradespeople unprotected during certain circumstances of tool theft. For example, third-party-only vehicle policies will not cover a tradesperson if their van needs to be repaired or replaced in the event of tool theft. (See PART 2 and PART 6 for more information about tool insurance policies.)

We asked tradespeople to tell us under which circumstances their tools were stolen. The circumstance with the highest rate of tool theft is outside a tradesperson's home, inside their van.

38.5% **of tradespeople report having their tools stolen outside their home from their van.**

The circumstance with the lowest rate of tool theft is inside their homes; only 1.4% of tradespeople report having their tools stolen from inside their homes.



Appendix 1B-vii) Circumstances under which tools were stolen.

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ECONOMIC IMPACT

INTRODUCTION

It must be recognised that the economic impact of tool theft upon tradespeople goes beyond the cost of replacing the stolen goods. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the crime, the tradesperson may have to find extra funds for unexpected expenditures like fixing a van that was broken into, or taking time off while they replenish their tool stock.

When we asked tradespeople to tell us how having their tools stolen impacted them financially, **10.6% of tradespeople told us that they had to take time off work or decline work while they found new equipment.**

	(%)
I had to pay for new tools to replace those stolen	35.41
I had to pay for damage to repair my vehicle	12.98
I had to decline work / take a few days off	10.60
I had to use a credit card	9.19
I had to rely on my friends and family to support me	7.37
I had to make an insurance claim	5.67
I had to rely on support from the company I work for	5.41
I had to pay to hire tools until I could replace those stolen	4.60
I had to take out a loan	4.40
I had to pay for damage to repair my property	2.67
Other	1.70

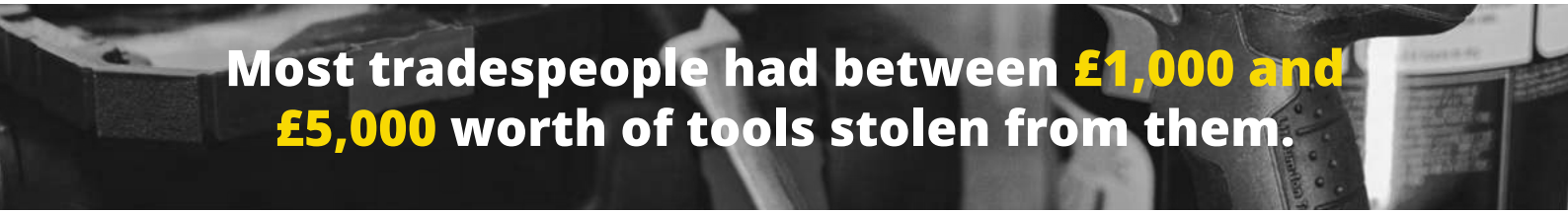
Appendix 1C-viii) Describe how the tool theft experience(s) impacted you financially.

> ***"I lost £14,000 from both instances of tool theft. You can never get everything back; I'm still reeling from it now. The first time it happened, I was off work for weeks while I was replacing my tools. Still, years after, I sometimes look for a tool and I'll realise that it's gone as well. I'm still replacing my tools and it's a long-winded process. It is expensive, too. Tools I bought 20 years ago have tripled in price; I have to add another third on top of my costs to account for inflation."***

THE VALUE OF STOLEN TOOLS

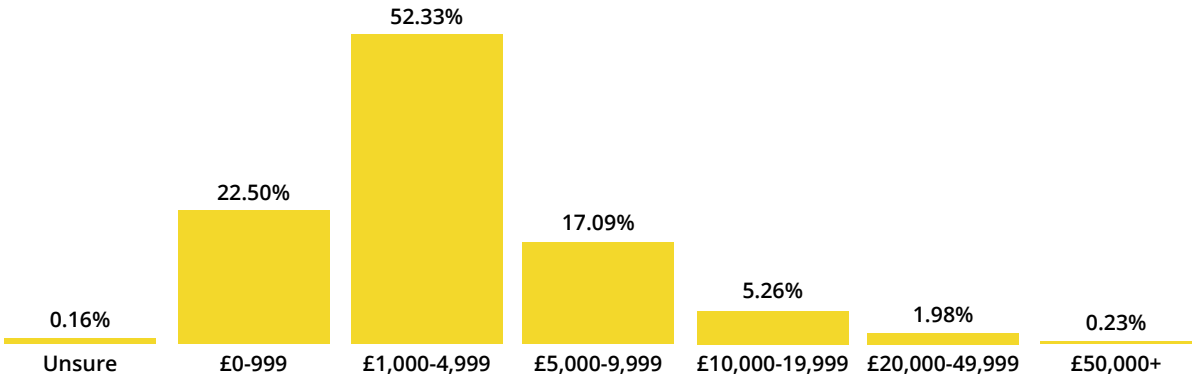
According to a freedom of information response from the Metropolitan Police, £17,494,360 worth of tools were stolen in 2020 and £17,141,284 worth of tools were stolen in 2021, a total of £34,635,644 across both years.[32]

We asked tradespeople to tell us the total value of the tools that were stolen from them.



Most tradespeople had between £1,000 and £5,000 worth of tools stolen from them.

According to our research, a total of £5,021,256 has been stolen from UK tradespeople who took our survey, with 2% of tradespeople having had as much as £20,000 worth of tools stolen from them.



Appendix 1C-v) Total value of tools stolen during UK tradespeople's experience(s) with tool theft.

According to the Metropolitan Police, the category of stolen tools with the highest property value across 2020 and 2021 were power hand tools, totalling £23,232,249 collectively.[33]

A practice some tradespeople take to defend their tools from theft is choosing to forego advertising on their van; this way, the thieves don't know what tools are inside. Other tradespeople believe tool thieves to be indiscriminate, no matter what advertising is on the van.

> ***"Any van is a target for quick cash. Tool thieves aren't being specific. I saw a drainage van get robbed, the other day. The best the thieves are going to get there is a plunger! The van even advertised that they were drainage services."***

We asked tradespeople to tell us which tools were stolen during their experience(s) with tool theft. The type of tool most at risk of being stolen was power tools (33%), while the type of tool least at risk of being stolen was a tradesperson's mobile phone (1%).[34]

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

There is a significant difference in the financial strain caused by tool theft depending on the employment status of the tradesperson. While it might be easier for a tradesperson who is employed by a larger company to find replacement tools, their self-employed counterparts may have to rely on emergency loans or credit cards.

We asked tradespeople to tell us what their employment status was when their tools were stolen from them.

Self-employed tradespeople (68%) were more likely than employed tradespeople (30%) to have their tools stolen.[35]

Tradespeople who have been impacted by tool theft frequently express concerns that they were watched or followed before the crime. Credence is then given to the presumption that more organised tool thieves could be actively targeting tradespeople who are self-employed rather than employed.

> ***"If I have my tools robbed now and I had to go to work the next day, I know full well that the mortgage comes first and I have to keep a roof over my head. I'd have to ask my manager to lend me some tools and I'd pay them back at a later date."***
>
> *-Testimony from an employed tradesperson*

> ***"My team had between £9,500 and £10,000 worth of tools stolen collectively. We stopped working on the job for about three or four days. We had to try and scratch together what we could between family members to rebuild a basic kit and finish the job. We were all fully self-employed at the time."***
>
> *-Testimony from a self-employed tradesperson*

> ***"The second time my tools were stolen was when I was working for a company. We had just pulled up to a job in our van and were standing on the pavement when my gaffer reached for his bum bag and realised his keys had been taken by a passerby. We think we were followed to the job."***

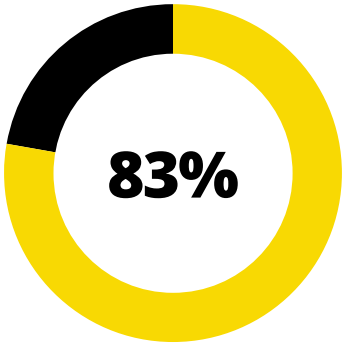
INSURANCE PAYOUTS

It can be difficult for tradespeople to know which policy will completely cover their tools in the event of theft.. For example, the usual four insurance routes – home insurance, life insurance, vehicle insurance and travel insurance – can exclude tools.

Sometimes, a tradesperson may feel like the most appropriate policy to take out is vehicle insurance; particularly commercial van insurance. However, vehicle insurance generally won't comprehensively cover tools in the event of theft. For example, the policy may pay for the repairs to a van if it's broken into, but not to replace the tools that were stolen.

It is possible for a tradesperson to secure a dedicated tool insurance policy which will cover in the event of theft. Despite this being available many respondents did not have such cover in place.

We asked tradespeople to tell us whether their tools were insured during their experience(s) with tool theft.



of tradespeople told us that they didn't have insurance at the time of the tool theft.[37]

We also asked tradespeople who had an insurance policy in place to tell us whether they were compensated for the tools that were stolen from them. The findings showed that 51% of tradespeople were partially compensated and just 17% of tradespeople were fully compensated for the cost of their stolen tools.[38]

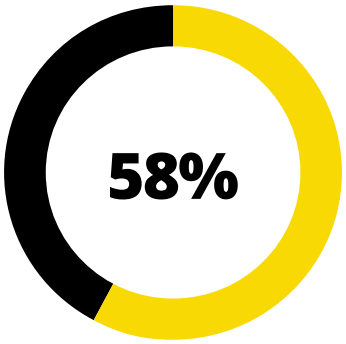
"I had my tools insured, but it took four to six weeks before the claim was finalised. So, I had to buy and borrow replacement tools in the meantime.

The excess on the insurance was £250, and I had to really haggle with them to cover the tools that needed to be covered. The insurance claim in itself cost me over £300."

THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

The Office for National Statistics has been investigating UK adults' opinions about the cost of living crisis since November 2021. Back then, 32 million people (6 in 10 UK adults) had reported an increase in their cost of living. By 5th August 2022, 46 million people (9 in 10 UK adults) had reported an increase in their cost of living.[39]

We asked tradespeople to tell us whether they thought the cost of living crisis would impact the frequency of tool theft. The general consensus was negative;



of tradespeople thought that it was very likely that the cost of living crisis would increase the likelihood of their tools being stolen.[40]

> ***"I think the cost of living crisis will exaggerate tool theft. Thieves who are in desperate situations will see it as an opportunity. Maybe it's not something they do as a regular thing, but times are getting tight and people are going to become more desperate."***

However, there is a disparity in the opinions of tradespeople in different age demographics as to whether the cost of living crisis will affect the rates of tool theft. It could be assumed that tradespeople aged 45 and over will have first-hand experience with finance management through multiple recessions and the high-interest rates of the late 80s and early 90s. However, 54% of tradespeople aged 45 and over compared to 46% of tradespeople younger than 45 strongly agree that it is very likely for the cost of living crisis to impact the frequency of tool theft.

> ***"I don't think the cost of living crisis will impact tool theft rates at all. I think it's always going to happen, regardless of what's happening in the country."***

	(%)
18-24	9.92
25-34	18.41
35-44	17.89
45-54	22.85
55-64	23.37
65+	7.57

Appendix 1C-vii) Age demographics of tradespeople who agree it is very likely that the cost of living crisis will affect the frequency of tool thefts.

The likelihood of the cost of living crisis increasing the frequency of tool theft might depend on the general intentions of the perpetrators of tool theft.

"There are organised guys who are working in teams and scoping places out and then you have the bloke down the road who needs £40 for his cider. I think the organised guys are always going to steal, regardless."

(See PART 6: Punishments for more information about tool theft crime and punishment)

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THE TOOLS MARKET

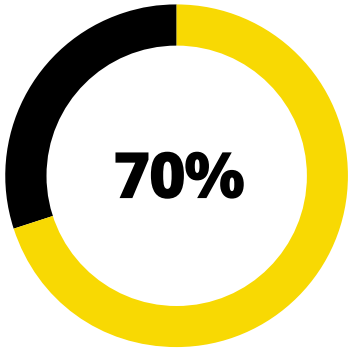
THE MARKET FOR STOLEN TOOLS IN THE UK

After tool theft occurs, the perpetrators go on to sell the tools in a variety of ways. Stolen tools can be re-sold in both physical and digital settings. It is arguably even easier now with online marketplaces to move stolen goods, with limited checks needed to use e-commerce facilities.

Whilst tool theft is a known prevalent issue across the construction industry, this report aims to understand if there is a lack of public awareness surrounding tradespeople experiencing tool theft.

	(%)
Never	3
One time	16
Two times	20
Three times	15
Four times	6
Five times	3
More than five times	10
Unsure	26

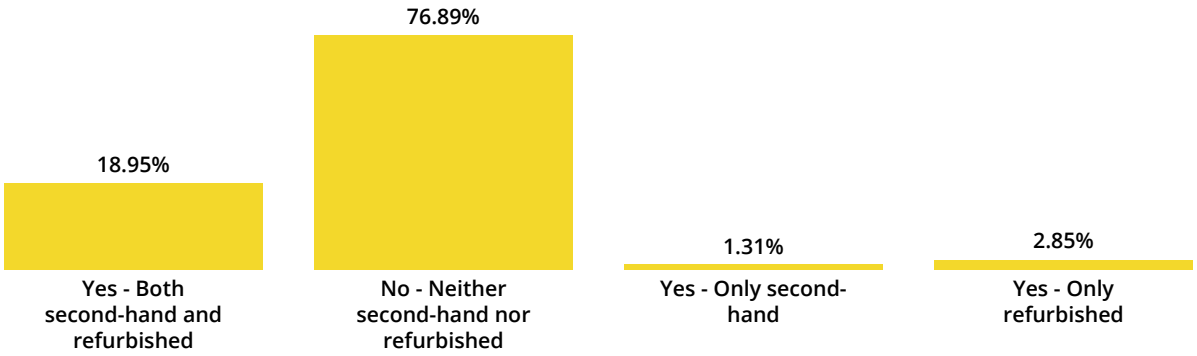
Appendix 2C) Thinking about the last year (i.e. since September 2021). How many times do you think the average UK tradesperson has had their tools stolen in the last year?



of consumers believe that the average tradesperson has had their tools stolen once or more over the past year.

WHERE ARE SECOND-HAND TOOLS SOLD?

We asked tradespeople whether they purchase second-hand or refurbished tools, and **77% stated that they do not.**



Appendix 1D-i) Do you buy second-hand or refurbished tools?

When asked where they purchase second-hand tools, purchasing from friends, colleagues and family was the most common source (38.7%), followed by eBay (38%), Facebook Marketplace (35.4%), tool groups and forums (16.7%) and car boots (14.3%).[41]

According to the focus groups, opinions about purchasing second-hand tools are polarising among tradespeople. Those who don't purchase second-hand tools say they are driven by moral responsibility, in connection with having an experience or awareness of tool theft. Contrastingly, the tradespeople who do purchase second-hand tools cite cost-saving motivations or claim that they are replacing stolen or lost tools.

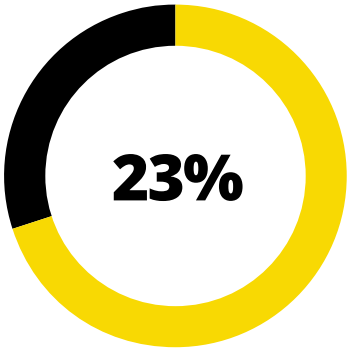
"Nothing would make me buy a second-hand tool. I wouldn't want to be the person accidentally buying a stolen tool. I love tools, as well. You have warranty issues, too, when buying second-hand. However, I'm sure there's a use for second-hand tools."

"Most of the tools that I've bought are brand new, but I am part of a forum which is a tool-selling site. The administrators are really good at checking things out. I do see tools in car boot sales and pick up some bits or pieces when I can. At the end of the day, if you're buying brand new, the company is making a profit. If you can get the same tool cheaper, why wouldn't you? It's the same process as buying cars in my opinion."

"I no longer buy second-hand tools. I have bought second-hand tools in the past, but after I had mine stolen, it really made me question what the origin of my second-hand tools were. I thought I was just buying tools from someone who was finished with them."

CONSUMERS OR TRADESPEOPLE?

To better understand who or what is driving the sales of used tools in the UK we asked both tradespeople and consumers about their purchasing habits for this type of product.



of consumers and 20% of tradespeople said they purchase second-hand and/or refurbished tools.[42]

While the data shows that both consumers and tradespeople purchase second-hand and/or refurbished tools, it is important to note that there has been recent high consumer demand for DIY products and home improvement over the last two years as an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which may cause the consumer data to be higher than it would have been otherwise.[43]

It is not possible to identify the proportion of second-hand or refurbished tools that come onto the market as a result of tool theft. This is a limitation of this study.

	(%)
Never	3
One time	16
Two times	20
Three times	15
Four times	6

Appendix 2A) Consumers: Have you purchased second-hand or refurbished tools before?

CAN REFURBISHED TOOLS HELP THE SITUATION?

With an increased understanding of the need to offset carbon and be more sustainable, some manufacturers and retailers have started to sell more refurbished tools.

Looking at the demand for refurbished tools amongst both tradespeople and consumers, 13% of consumers said they have purchased second-hand and refurbished tools, and 2% said they have purchased refurbished only.[44] In comparison, 19% of tradespeople said they had purchased both second-hand and refurbished tools, and 3% said they had purchased refurbished only.[45]

Purchasing refurbished tools could be an answer to providing more cost efficiencies for tradespeople whilst also offering some piece of mind, with many refurbished tools now carrying warranties and customer service options.

The HSE advises that when reselling second-hand equipment for use at work, adequate information about using the equipment, normally original equipment instruction manuals, must be provided in English.[46] Such legislation could help to ensure the origins of products and prevent stolen tools from being sold via this route for professional use.

CHECKS WHEN PURCHASING SECOND-HAND TOOLS

According to our research, the majority of tradespeople and consumers said that they undertake some form of a check when purchasing second-hand or refurbished tools. With high awareness surrounding the issue of tool theft, this is not surprising. The most common form of check was only purchasing from reputable sellers, which 33% of tradespeople and 47% of consumers stated they follow.

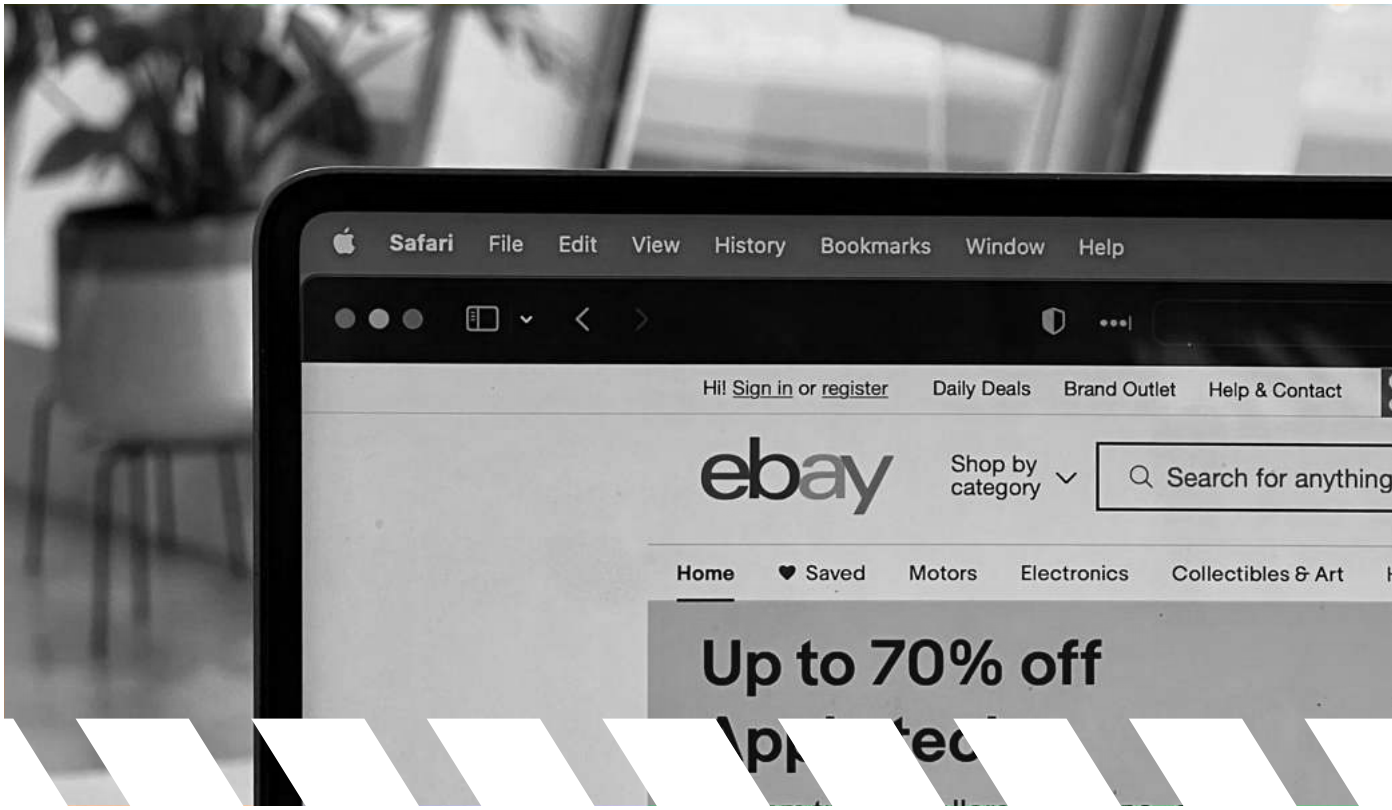
	(%)
I only buy from reputable sellers	33.13
I check for signs of engraved initials or identifiable marks	23.18
I ask the seller about the origins of the item	19.80
I check the serial numbers and use online registers	13.83
I do not make any checks	9.55
Other	0.50

Appendix 1D-v) Tradespeople: Which of the following checks do you make when buying second-hand or refurbished tools?.

	(%)
I only buy from reputable sellers	47
I ask the seller about the origins of the item	30
I check for signs of engraved initials or identifiable marks	24
I do not make any checks	19
I check the serial numbers and use online registers	15
Unsure	7
Other	5

Appendix 2B) Consumers: Which of the following checks do you make when purchasing second-hand or refurbished tools?

> ***"After my combi drill got stolen, I was able to find a similar model on Facebook Marketplace shortly after. I bought a laser from eBay as well, about a year ago. All my drills and power tools have my initials carved into them. I'll also write on them with a sharpie."***



WHERE ARE STOLEN TOOLS SOLD?

Stolen tools are thought to be sold via online marketplaces, at in-person selling events such as car boot sales, and directly to individuals in the trade and beyond.

Many of these tools will be legally resold by tradespeople, consumers, reputable sellers, and companies alike. However, it is anticipated that stolen tools are also hidden amongst these statistics.

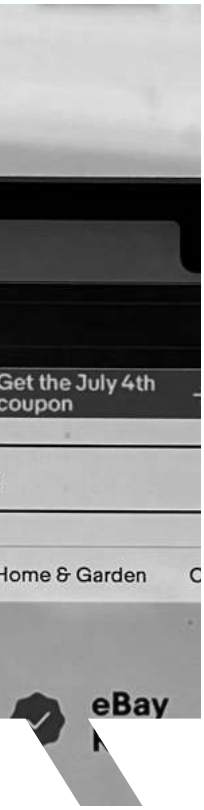
EBAY

At the time of August 2022, the amount of eBay adverts in the UK for the following common power tools were as follows:

	(%)
Used Paslode nail gun	1,500
Used Stihl chainsaw	1,300
Used DeWalt drill	1,300
Used Milwaukee impact driver	738

eBay has policies in place to prevent any illegal goods from being sold:

> ***"The sale of stolen property is not allowed on eBay. The sale of stolen property violates state, federal and international law, and we will work with law enforcement in any attempts to sell stolen property."*** [47]



FACEBOOK

Due to geographical settings on Facebook Marketplace, it is not possible to see the current volume of adverts live for used tools across the entire UK at one time.
However, when looking for search terms around common power tools on the platform within a 50km radius as part of this research, it is clear that they are readily available to purchase.

Facebook also has commercial policies in place to prevent any illegal goods from being sold on the platform, in addition to advice to contact your local police to report a stolen item.

> ***"Listings may not promote the buying or selling of items that have been stolen."*** [48]

CAR BOOT SALES

There are hundreds of car boot sales that take place every week across the UK, with easy access for anyone to sell all kinds of goods. However, there are different requirements when selling at car boot sales depending on if you are classed as a trader or not.

When traders sell tools at car boot sales, they are required to comply with trading standards to not sell stolen items, and the Consumer Rights Act of 2015 which states that 'all goods should be of satisfactory quality, fit for purpose and 'as described'.' However, it is acknowledged that many people who sell at car boots do not consider themselves to be traders, when in fact they are classed as such in the eyes of the law.[49]

“I think stolen tools are on Facebook Marketplace, Gumtree, eBay, and in car boot sales. Thieves will ship it to their mate and their mate will sell it for them out of the area – these are all theories. I think that there are also people who are genuinely well-meaning and looking for a bargain and who are genuinely unaware that they’re buying stolen tools”

“I think a lot of stolen tools are probably on Facebook Marketplace and in car boot sales.”

THE STRENGTH OF THE TOOLS MARKET

Power tools were identified as the most commonly stolen type of tool in the UK[50], and the market for tools itself is worth billions of pounds.

To explore this further, we looked at Google search trends from the last 12 months. The phrase 'power tools' has been searched on Google an average of between 10 and 100,000 times per month in the UK.[51] The search term 'second-hand tools' has been searched between 1 and 100,000 times a month in the UK.[52] As an example, this demonstrates the demand for these types of products both new and used.

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ART OUR

MENTAL HEALTH

HOW TOOL THEFT IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH

As an industry, UK construction has focused on improving workers' health and safety for decades, with the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act in 1974 often cited as a turning point for change.[53] The act came into force at a time when 25% of all workplace deaths were construction-related and after a long period of practices with little to no H&S policies and regulations.[54]

Great strides to improve safety have occurred since this point, through an industry-wide effort to build a safety culture into all practices backed up by the law that made employers more responsible.

The 'health' side of health and safety, however, has only received focus in more recent years, and mental health as a sub-set, even more recently. This aligns with modern society's increased understanding of the connection between physical and mental health.[55]

Mental health is an issue for many tradespeople; the risk of suicide among some site-based workers is reportedly three times the national average as of August 2021.[56] Without question, the construction industry has a serious mental health problem.

The mental health challenges impacting the industry are widely acknowledged by key stakeholders across construction with a desire to make things better for tradespeople.[57] Many programmes and case studies of best practice can now be utilised, from large contractors introducing Mental Health First Aid programmes to toolbox talks for subcontractors.

TRADESPEOPLE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Tradespeople often work in conditions which can exacerbate poor mental health, including but not limited to:

- // Working in tough physical conditions
- // Lone working
- // Working away from home
- // High self-employment rates
- // Job insecurity
- // Being at risk of tool theft

There is a desire to make a change and improve the wellbeing of those working within construction. The Construction Industry Training Board says:

> ***"Construction companies and industry stakeholders emphasise the need for leadership to improve mental health and wellbeing – for those with influence to take responsibility."*** [58]

More recent events such as the Covid-19 pandemic have placed a spotlight on why working in the construction industry can link to poor mental health outcomes.

A recent report by the charity Mates in Mind revealed that over two-thirds of construction workers believe there is a stigma surrounding mental health which stops them from talking about it.[59] However, the same report also uncovered that a third of construction workers suffer from severe levels of anxiety every day.[60]

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TOOL THEFT AND MENTAL HEALTH

Experiencing any kind of theft can cause feelings of worry, anxiety, anger and distress.

39% **of all tradespeople surveyed agreed that having tools stolen has had a 'strong impact" on their mental health, with the figure significantly higher for self-employed tradespeople specifically (66%).** [61]

	(%)
Strongly agree	38.97
Somewhat agree	30.18
Neutral/unsure	21.40
Somewhat disagree	4.62
Strongly disagree	4.82

Appendix 1E-ii) How much do you agree with this statement: "Having my tools stolen has impacted my mental health"?

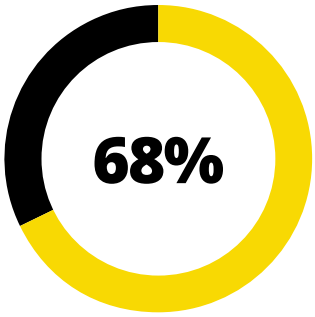
With such a high percentage of those who work in the industry choosing the self-employment route, making them responsible for financial security, it is no surprise this group felt more consequences. The Construction Industry Training Board says:

> ***"One of the key challenges for the industry is to ensure that mental health and wellbeing support is extended to small firms (including through supply chains), sub-contractors and self-employed workers. These often difficult-to-reach workers should be at the forefront of new thinking."*** [62]

Having tools stolen was described by many as going beyond standard theft, as it impacted their livelihoods, with many respondents stating that it kept them off work for days or weeks. (See PART 2: Economic Impact for more information.)

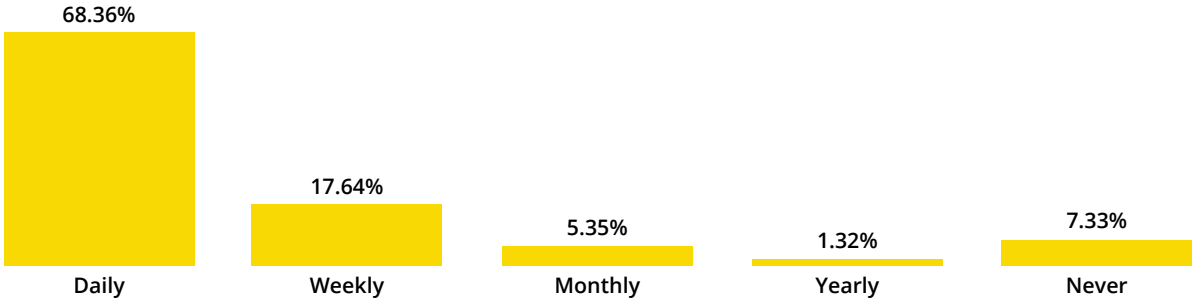
ANXIETY AND WORRY

We asked tradespeople how often they worry about getting their tools stolen.



of tradespeople surveyed stated that they worry about tool theft daily.

Of other respondents, 17.6% said they worry about it weekly, and only 7.3% stated that they never worry about it. It's clear that tool theft is something that can cause additional stress, anxiety and worry for tradespeople.



Appendix 1E-ii) How much do you agree with this statement: "Having my tools stolen has impacted my mental health"?

> ***"It's made me more hyper-secure. I have CCTV and dial-up alarms that are wired into my phone. I'm conscious of it daily. It's taken me a lot of years to replace my stuff and if it happened again, I would throw in the towel."***

The NHS determines anxiety as 'a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe'. [63] Of the tradespeople surveyed, 15% said they felt increased anxiety after experiencing tool theft, 19% said they were less trusting of others, and 8% said they had problems with sleeping.[64]

> ***"It's on my mind every day. I've been teamed up with someone for the last year or so and I was challenging him the other day about which tools are mine. My batteries are bright red – they stand out. "***

STRESS AND ANGER

The mental health charity Mind defines stress as 'how we react when we feel under pressure or threatened'. According to their advice, It usually happens when we are in a situation that we don't feel we can manage or control.[65]

Of the tradespeople surveyed, 20% said they'd experienced stress following tool theft, and 20.5% said they had experienced anger.[66]

> ***"I'm kind of like a volcano; I could be doing time. I fear what I would have done. I would have battered him until he didn't breathe. I was distraught because I was trying to provide for my family and they think it's their right to take your gear. I take whatever tools I can into the job I'm doing. Because I have so many different tools that I need, you can't physically do it. I have the van boarded out, so all the tools are in one section. I have my insurance now, luckily."***

DEPRESSION

According to the results of our research, 5.1% of tradespeople said they had experienced depression following tool theft and 2% said they had experienced low self-esteem.[67]

> ***"You second guess yourself forever afterwards. If I had not gone in on that day, it would have saved me money. There's a financial impact but the psychological impact stays with you longer."***

> ***"Even if it's the middle of the night and I hear a slight noise I'll jump up to make sure they're not stealing anything from my van. It's not an ideal situation to be in."***

Out of the 3,946 suicides recorded in 2020, 642 were categorised as working within skilled trade occupations. This equates to 16.2% of suicides for an industry that employs circa 7% of the population.[68]

From our research, 0.86% of those surveyed said one of the impacts of having their tools stolen was experiencing suicidal thoughts.[69]

If you are struggling with your mental health, please speak to a professional or contact one of these charities;

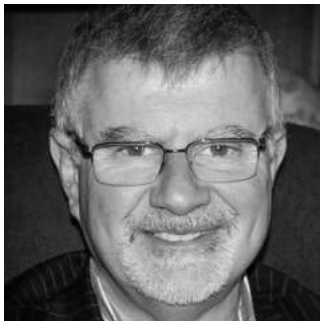
- **Lighthouse Club**
  0345 609 1956
  https://www.lighthouseclub.org

- **National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK**
  0800 689 5652
  www.spbristol.org/NSPHUK

- **Rethink Mental Illness**
  0808 801 0525
  https://www.rethink.org/

- **Samaritans**
  116 123 (freephone)
  https://www.samaritans.org/
  Samaritans are open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk.

WE ASKED CHARITY RAINY DAY TRUST WHAT MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TRADESPEOPLE OFTEN NEED AFTER THEIR TOOLS ARE STOLEN.



"Each case will be different, based on the person's resilience and how often it may have happened before. However, the common needs are counselling, new security devices, and being put in contact with other people in a similar position so that they can share their experiences."

- Bryan Clover, FRSA, Rainy Day Trust, CEO

RAINY DAY TRUST
THE CHARITY OF THE HOME IMPROVEMENT AND HOME ENHANCEMENT INDUSTRY

WE ASKED CHARITY BAND OF BUILDERS THE SAME QUESTION.

"I know of someone who actually took their life in connection with tool theft; there may have been several other factors – but it did act as a tipping point. There is a strong connection between tool theft and mental health impacts. I know first-hand after having my tools stolen, how it can have such wide-ranging consequences.
At Band of Builders, we offer services to give people the chance to talk to someone in times of distress. It's so important to talk and tradespeople don't need to feel alone. Whether that is through our Big Brew counselling service, or our new text BoB service that we are launching, we give people the chance to connect at the moment when they need it most."

- Gavin Crane, Band of Builders, CEO

THE LASTING IMPACTS OF TOOL THEFT

Our research uncovered many different psychological impacts of tool theft on people's behaviour, from a lack of trust in others and wider society to feeling confused and powerless, to strong anger and desire for retribution.

The level of distress can cause people to blame themselves for not 'triple checking' or leaving something, somewhere etc. Even physical symptoms such as headaches or lack of sleep were mentioned by research participants as occurring as an impact of tool theft.

It is important to recognise the limitations of this study as often people living with a mental illness are less likely to participate in research studies.[70]

P

ART FIVE

CASE STUDIES

JAMES REEVE

James has been in the trade for 15 years. He has been running his own painting and decorating business, Royal Spa Decoration, in Warwickshire for the last 10 years, specialising in premium residential, development, restoration and commercial painting and decorating.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF TOOL THEFT

> ***"Until it happens to you, you never think it's going to happen."***

"One of my vans was broken into in the middle of the daytime, in a very public area under CCTV. It just makes you wonder: are you being watched? It's something that opens your eyes to just how easily it can happen.

Looking back at the timeline of events, they were in and out in ten minutes. So, they've come along and drilled the side door of the van, which is quite a common thing, which enables them to open it from the inside. Then they helped themselves to all my tools."

THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF TOOL THEFT

"Without being able to give an exact figure on how much it cost me, I'd say I lost somewhere in the region of £2,500 worth of tools. Then there was obviously the excess to pay on the van which had to be recovered, and repairs had to be done on it which was another few hundred quid. When you get a hire van, you also have to pay for the first hundred odd quid upfront, too.

With my insurance company, if you're VAT registered you have to pay the VAT on the repairs. You could argue that's money you get back but at the time it was another £300-400 quid I had to pay out on top of the money that I hadn't anticipated paying in the first place.

It's a bit of a black hole, a vicious cycle of events once it happens. The trouble is that you invest in stuff like specialist tools to be able to do your job to the best of your ability; you never expect them all to disappear at exactly the same time. You're forced into a situation where you have to pay to replace or repair what you've lost. I am lucky because I was able to pay for that, but it wasn't ideal. I've seen people who don't have any means of earning more money to pay to buy new tools. What can they do apart from give up? That's the sad reality of it."

THE LASTING IMPACT

"You instantly think 'I wish I'd never parked there' or 'I wish I'd just stayed at home today', but you can't think too much in hindsight. It definitely does make you feel, at least for a short period of time, like giving up because you just think 'what's the point?'. I work incredibly hard to afford thousands of pounds for specialist tools to be able to do a job to a decent level, someone just came along and took it away in an instant. It does make you question what the point is.

You work hard to pay your bills and live your life. The government already takes as much as they can of that to start with, and then people just come along and nick your tools – so you end up feeling like you can't win. I felt stuck between a rock and a hard place. It all gets snatched away from you so easily.

The sad thing about it is that it cost me thousands of pounds to build up my kit, and it's probably been sold to someone for £50. That's hard to come to terms with.

It plays on your mind. When someone's come into your van, your space, without your consent and done what they wanted, you worry that they've earmarked your van. Now they know you're going to replace your tools, they might come back for them again. You go down a bit of a rabbit hole second guessing everything and worrying about everything.

There's definitely an impact, a ripple effect that makes you question everything."

HOW CAN TOOL THEFT BE REDUCED?

"I think the missing link is the fact there's no real consequence from it.

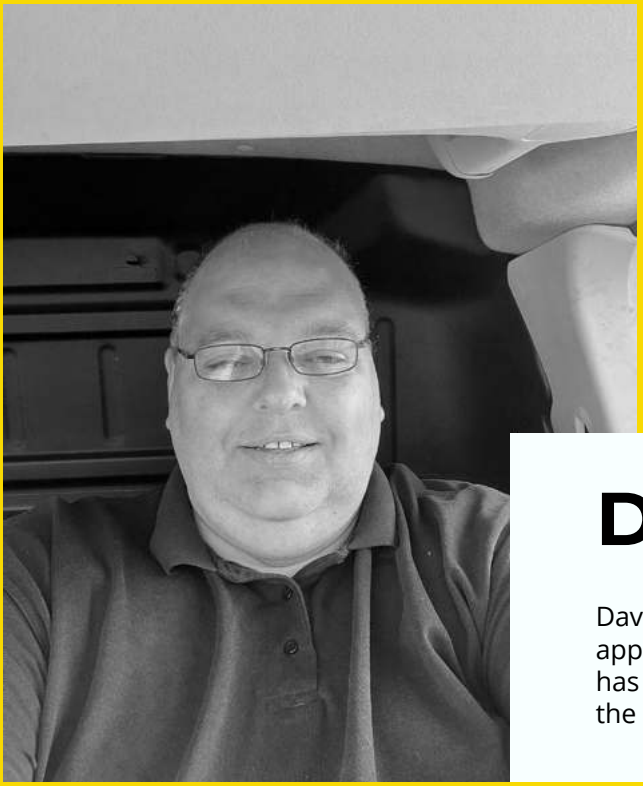
In my case, the theft didn't take place in the middle of the night on an industrial estate. It was in a very busy area in the middle of the day in front of CCTV. And yet the police's view was that it wasn't even worth their time investigating it. They called me a week later to say, 'just to let you know we've not had any information so we're closing the case'. But of course, they hadn't had any leads, because they'd not investigated it – so unless someone physically comes to hand themselves in then no action is getting taken.

There are just no consequences for it. If someone walked out of a shop having stolen a flat-screen TV and the police's attitude was that they're not going to go after them, then people would be in there every day nicking another one. That's the problem: complete lack of consequences.

These people who do it, do it for a 'living' if you can call it that. They do it as a day-in-day-out occurrence and they know that they'll be able to continue to do it because there isn't the will from the police to go after them.

So, I think it needs to be looked at in a different light. It's not like going into a store of a multi-billion pound conglomerate to steal a packet of sweets – you're stealing someone's livelihood. It should be treated in a similar way to an assault because that's basically what it is; you're taking people's belongings, which results in potentially taking food off a family's table. You don't know what the impact of it is going to be, and the police just aren't looking into it.

It is heartbreaking. And what's worse is that if you caught them and got into an altercation with them, you'd probably end up in more trouble than they would. It just feels backwards. If the police took more action against tool theft – especially against repeat offenders – and they got serious jail time then maybe they wouldn't do it as often."



DAVID COTTON

Dave started out his career by completing an apprenticeship with the MEB electric board and has now been working in fire and security for the last 20 years.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF TOOL THEFT

“My first experience was years ago. I’d just finished my apprenticeship and I was working for MEB, the local electricity board for the West Midlands, and my van was broken into. They nicked my toolbox which contained all my hand tools, and all my little bits that were useful. I was more annoyed about the toolbox because I’d made it while I was an apprentice.

After that I was always very, very careful, removing tools out of my vehicle ever since, and taking anything else expensive out of the van.

But a few weeks ago, my company van got broken into. I’d parked up outside my house but received a call-out, so I didn’t bother taking my tools out – I thought I could leave them there while I grabbed a quick bite to eat before I headed to the job. In that little space of time my van got done over.

They managed to take all my hand tools, which I’d had for a long time, as well as my phone which had sentimental value. Everyone says it’s just a phone, but it’s not just a phone when it’s your dad’s phone that he’s given you. It just felt rubbish. The few things not stolen the first time round all got stolen this time, like the claw hammer my dad bought me for my apprenticeship that had been with me a long time.”

THE LASTING IMPACT

"The first time it happened, in the mid 90's, I called the police and they actually came round to take swabs and try and get fingerprints. Unfortunately, they couldn't find them, and the case was closed but they showed presence. So, because of that I felt in a good place with it. Luckily I had the support of my mum and dad and they helped me out with money to get some more tools.

When it happened recently it was outside my own house. We live in the middle of nowhere and vehicle theft isn't heard of round there – so it felt really weird that my van was targeted.

This time around the police just said, 'we've closed the case, we've got no information for you'. They just weren't interested at all. I have decent CCTV around my house, so I got some really clear images of the car, its reg, plus the thieves' full face and body. I just felt so demoralised that someone had got in my van and pinched my stuff, and nothing was done."

THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF TOOL THEFT

"The problem is, times are hard at the moment. I'm not self-employed, I work for a company and they've helped me out a lot, but when you have to go on a call-out and all the stuff you need has just been nicked it does prove problematic.

Having to outlay for all my stuff again when the price of everything has gone up ridiculously, plus the price of electricity and gas, is ridiculous – it's just hard work.

Luckily all my hand tools got replaced by my company. I've got a great boss who helped me well and truly, and they were kind enough to go through everything. But even though he helped me massively with my hand tools I still had to get myself a brand new contract for my phone. That's gone up from £15 a month to £75 a month in order to get a decent phone – £60 a month extra for the next few years. It's annoying because I had a good phone in the first place!"

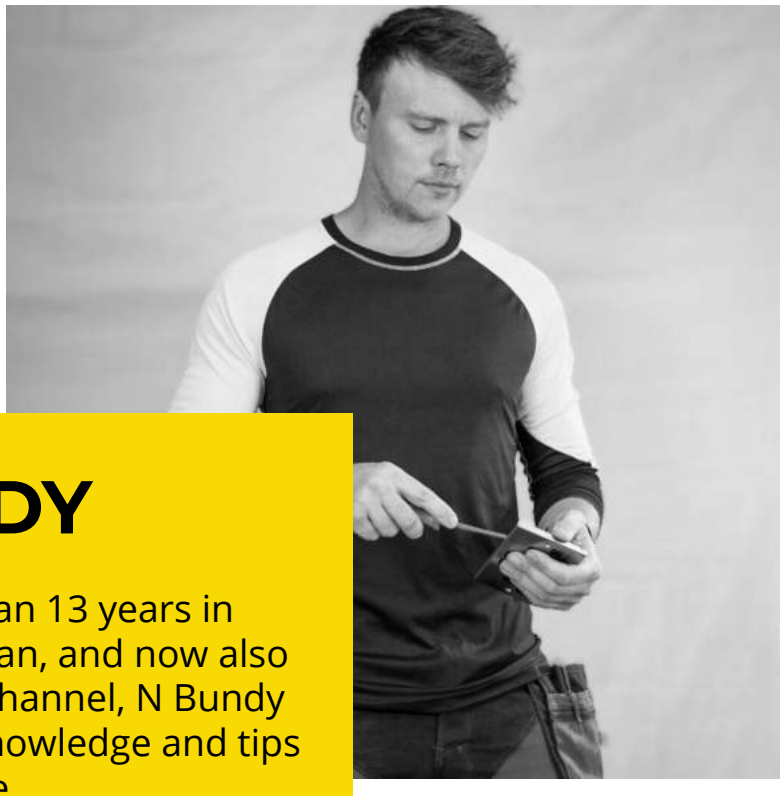
HOW CAN TOOL THEFT BE REDUCED?

"Vauxhall really doesn't take security seriously on their vehicles – that's one thing I'd tell other tradespeople about my experience. My Vauxhall Partner van had the small quarter window at the front of the van smashed, and apparently if you get though that you can push buttons to unlock the entire vehicle. Not secure at all.

I think to improve van security for tradespeople there should be a Van Vault or equivalent in the back, and a lock box in the front as standard.

But to really tackle tool theft, punishment of the crime needs to be more severe. But that also requires the police to be more interested. I have a full HD CCTV system on my house because I'm a cautious person and didn't ever want everything to be stolen, and shared footage with them. I had an iPhone stolen with my tools, and even shared its location when Find My iPhone pinged it over. I sent so much information over to the police and felt really hopeful, but they just said they couldn't do anything. They just weren't interested. It made me feel horrific."

"It just made me feel horrific."



NICK BUNDY

Nick has spent more than 13 years in the trade as an electrician, and now also runs his own Youtube channel, N Bundy Electrical, sharing his knowledge and tips with other tradespeople.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF TOOL THEFT

"I had my old van broken into four times. The very first time, they took everything. I was naïve to it all, so I replaced the tools and then a month later they stole all the stuff I had just bought again. The experience wiped me out.

I ended up with no money whatsoever, so I had to borrow tools and bits and bobs off other people. They had obviously scouted it out, because six other vans on my estate were done at the same time, on both occasions. So not only did they steal all my stuff the first time, they knew to come back in a month's time when I had replaced everything.

By the time the third theft came around, my van was parked better and I had taken extra precautions but they somehow still managed to get in. They stole everything, including all the tools that people had lent me.

The fourth time, I caught them while they were doing it. I came out of my house to see the doors on my van were open and someone was in the back of it. I grabbed him out and we started having a fight. As I managed to get on top of the guy who'd been in my van, someone else got out what must've been their getaway vehicle. I didn't realise he was there, and he tried to hit me with a crowbar.

At that point, I stepped back. The driver of the other van got back into his vehicle to drive off and the guy who'd been robbing my tools jumped on the back of it to hide the licence plate. I tried to take a picture but he said if I did, he'd come back later with petrol."

THE LASTING IMPACT

"I obviously rang the police and reported it, but I was left looking out of the wind rest of the night. I didn't get much sleep; I was just anticipating them coming back something to the house. I have a new van now, and no-one's ever attempted to stea one. I'd be more prepared next time.

I had sleepless nights for a while, but the worst thing was the paranoia. I'd jump every ti light went on outside the front of my house, whether I was just on the sofa trying to watch upstairs. It even happens now three years on. No matter what noise it is, I'm straight up, loo out of my window checking the van. I don't think the paranoia will ever go away to be honest.

I've spoken to other people who are the same – any noise, any movement, and they're straight to the window looking at their van. Whatever they take is your livelihood, if they take that and you can't earn money to pay your mortgage then everything starts going wrong.

A lot of what was taken had been my dad's. He'd just retired, and I had started using some of his tools. It was a kick in the teeth at the time, but the worst part was that he passed away a couple of weeks after it happened. I could never replace those things that were sentimental to me and him, but they meant nothing to the people that stole them. To them they were just old tools, but for me it was my dad's stuff, which I'll never get back."

THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF TOOL THEFT

"It cost me, tool wise, between £4,000 ad £5,000, something like that. I had to pay van repair costs on top of that too. Luckily, they didn't cut a hole in the side of the van, because a lot of the time that writes the van off."

> ***"I also lost about a week off work, which was around £1,000 of earnings. So, you're probably talking around a £7,000 financial burden in total. And this was all within a year as well, it was all within a short period of time."***

HOW CAN TOOL THEFT BE REDUCED?

"One thing that really didn't help me was having my van sign-written, saying 'Electrician' on the side. My new van doesn't for that reason. If you want to sign-write your van, get a magnetic one you can take off at night.

Absolutely make sure you have tool insurance. I never did and it caused a lot of issues for me. I have it all now!

You could put in preventative measures such as deadlocks. I have deadlocks fitted to my van but then people say if they're going to get in, they'll get in. If they can't do the deadlock, then they'll just cut a hole in your roof which then writes your van off anyway. Whatever you suggest there's always a way around it.

We've got trackers in tools and batteries and stuff, so if stuff goes missing we could track people down to find it – whether that's me or the police is a different story. If you register the number on your power tools too, you might get it back if it ever gets found.

I'd like to hope for harsher sentences on people being caught, but these people aren't actually getting caught to my knowledge. They're just getting away with it.

The first time it happened the police came round, dusted for fingerprints and did everything they could do but if they wear gloves and balaclavas then you don't have any fingerprints. They had a fake number plate on too, so all you have is a video of your tools being stolen. The police said it's a needle in a haystack, that they're virtually impossible to find. It's happening so much, but what can the police do apart from patrol dodgy vehicles at night time when they have other things to do?"

P

ART SIX

PUNISHMENT

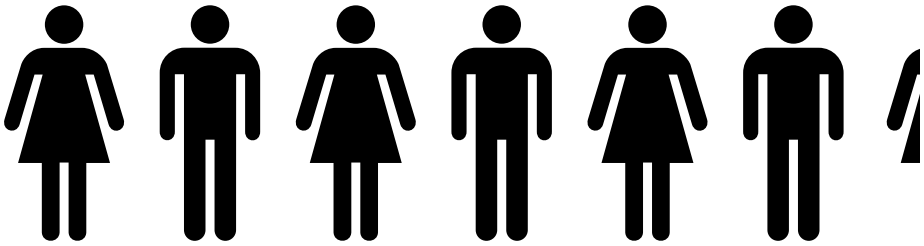
INTRODUCTION

Tool theft has many more implications for tradespeople than might initially appear; it can lead to loss of earnings, issues with mental health, rising costs of replacing tools, and more. As it stands, the allocation and penalty for perpetrators of tool theft is not in a specialised category, and is instead identical to the penalties for general theft:

> ***"Theft is triable either way with a maximum penalty in the Crown Court of seven years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine and in the magistrates' court, six months imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine."***[71]

Yet, the participants of our focus group argued that since the implications of tool theft are more severe than the implications of general theft, the punishment should reflect this. According to Statista, the average length of prison sentence in 2021 was just 12.5 months.[72]

> ***"You're just trying to provide a living and support your family, and someone takes that from you."***



73% of tradespeople agreed that tool theft should carry a more severe penalty than general theft.[73]

PENALTIES

With the costs to tradespeople's livelihoods, advertising capability, outgoings in tool hire, repair of damage to vehicles and more, it is clear to see why more severe penalties are being requested by tradespeople.

We asked tradespeople to tell us what legal punishments they thought should be given to perpetrators of tool theft. The majority of tradespeople (35%) thought that the most appropriate penalty for a perpetrator of tool theft is to pay full compensation. The least appropriate penalty for perpetrators of tool theft, in the opinions of UK tradespeople, is rehabilitation (3.6%).

	(%)
Paying full compensation to the victim	35.35
Prison	29.36
Fines	15.56
Community service	10.03
Capital or physical punishment	4.25
Rehabilitation	3.59
Other	1.86

Appendix 1F-iii) What legal punishment do you think tool thieves should be given?

LEGAL CATEGORISATION OF TOOL THEFT

When examining the need to revise legal allocation and penalties for perpetrators of tool theft, police data must be used. Our findings, after sending 45 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to police departments across the country, are that the crime of tool theft is not being accurately categorised. Instead, tool theft is either categorised under the umbrella of general theft, or theft of a vehicle.

To add to the confusion of how tool theft is reported and recorded, there are also variables and differences across each police force. Each response to an FOI request is unique and has not been used as a direct comparison with any other Force response we received. At the time of writing, out of all the forces contacted, only nine came back with the data sets requested. Therefore, we are unable to depict an accurate view of statistics across the UK from police data.

The response to an FOI request by the team for Dundee, Scotland summarises the challenges surrounding how tool theft is currently logged:

> ***"By way of explanation, there are no relevant markers available on Police Scotland crime recording systems which allow the automatic retrieval of this level of information, and so it is not possible to search for crime reports based upon the type of property stolen."***

This has been the case across many UK Police forces, meaning that this request falls outside reasonable time scales or the maximum cost restraints in place for Freedom of Information requests.

Beyond this, it is indicative that the data is also not easily accessible internally either, and inconsistencies in recording and reporting will make it difficult for the government to have a clear understanding of the scale and breadth of the issue, too.

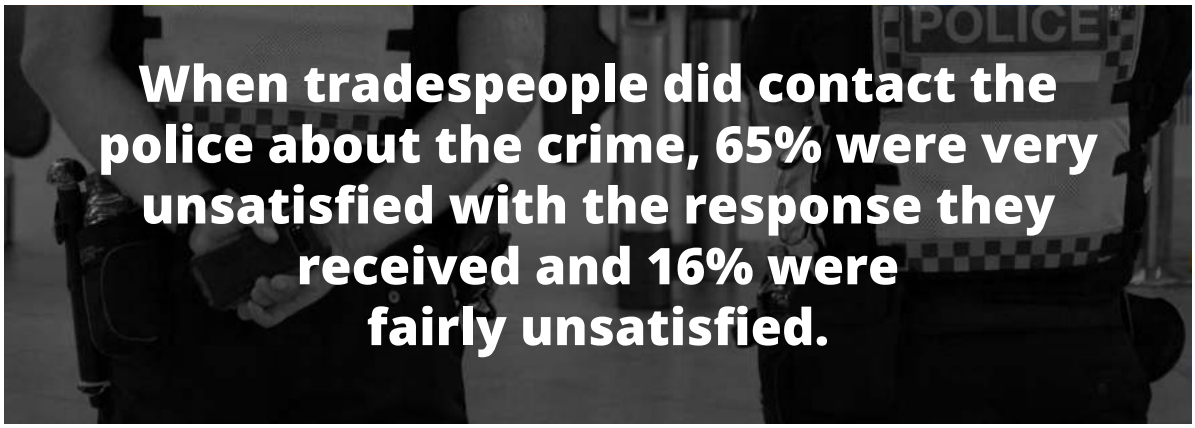
> ***"There's no real deterrent. The government, courts and police don't see it as a big enough issue."***

From the data we were able to obtain, only 3.6% of all cases recorded over the last five years actually led to a charge. £18,888,756.15 worth of tools and vehicles were logged as stolen during this period.[74] While this gives an idea of how much compensation could be owed to tradespeople in the UK, it doesn't take into account the fact that those buying new tools may have to pay more than they originally spent due to inflation year on year.[75]

THE POLICE RESPONSE

It should be noted that all of the above information is only pertinent if the police are contacted at the time of the tool theft, and if the police response is to file a case report.

When we asked tradespeople whether they contacted the police at the time of the tool theft, almost a quarter (22.7%) said that they did not.[76]



Only 1.7% of tradespeople who contacted the police at the time of the tool theft reported that they were very satisfied with the police response.[77] This was echoed by the focus group participants, with many reporting that they were given a crime reference number without any actual investigation taking place to look into where their stolen tools were, or who the perpetrators were:

> ***"It would be nice if the police cared a bit more. After the event, they just gave a crime reference number, not even sent anyone. They don't investigate properly."***

The general consensus of dissatisfaction with police responses among tradespeople who have had their tools stolen could be explained by the lack of standardisation in the categorisation of the crime.

> ***"I felt a mixture of angry, annoyed & violated. It would be nice if the police cared more and didn't just give you a crime reference number."***

> ***"I feel like the police look down on tradespeople. They just give you a crime reference number and move on."***

ORGANISED CRIME OR OPPORTUNISTS?

There is a question of whether there should be differences in punishments between opportunist thieves and organised gangs. If intent and planning are shown, or a criminal has been found to be a repeat offender, should there be a harsher punishment to reflect this?

In August 2022, Cambridgeshire Police arrested a man transporting an "Aladdin's Cave" of linked stolen construction equipment near Godmanchester.[78] This demonstrates a level of calculation and clear intent from an organised group who turned up well-equipped. There are differences in sentencing for manslaughter cases vs. murder cases, and the key distinction is often pre-meditation. Crimes of tool theft could be treated in much the same way to deter organised gangs.

Insight from our focus group revealed the lengths organised criminals will go to in order to get away with their crimes.

> ***"Thieves on site were raiding a van, but because they were wearing high-vis coats and hard hats no one questioned them being there."***

Organised gangs of thieves also don't seem to wait for the cover of darkness anymore, instead being incredibly overt in their activities. Members of the focus groups reported that their tools were stolen in broad daylight.

> ***"They were in and out in 10 minutes, they were highly organised."***

THE PUNISHMENT FOR THE PERPETRATORS

As aforementioned, 70% of tradespeople felt that punitive measures should be harsher.[79] Many tradespeople in our focus groups did not feel that there were enough deterrents in place currently to stem the tide against tool theft. One participant stated: "I'm not sure what will actually deter them - what will make them think it's not worth it."

The feeling of dissolution and abandonment caused by the current situation led tradespeople to feel that the only method to dissuade tool theft would be far more severe punishment – such as 'physical punishment' methods or even death penalties for repeat offenders.

Some tradespeople have taken matters into their own hands, with the invention of deterrents such as the 'Sting Ray', a van defence system that delivers an electric shock to would-be criminals who attempt to break into vehicles.[80] However, through use of 'vigilante' methods such as this, there is the potential to be at risk of punishment yourself. Ray, the inventor of Sting Ray, told On The Tools:

> ***"It makes me angry that the police are going to give me a visit [about the device], but not give me a visit when I've called them about my van being broken into."***

One tradesperson told us that they were given more serious investigation for their treatment of a tool thief than the thieves themselves were.

> ***"I want to change perception of tool theft. It's really personal & affects people's lives. It's not like shoplifting, it's much more."***

This perceived double standard causes frustration among many tradespeople, who feel that police don't give adequate investigative efforts to tool theft cases.

> ***"Maybe sentencing needs reviewing... People wouldn't do it so much if sentencing was stricter."***

DETERRENTS

Without a clear and reasonable deterrent in place for thieves, there will not be a reduction in the number of tradespeople being affected by theft.

Among tradespeople surveyed, there wasn't a clear consensus on what that deterrent could be. The second most popular response was 'prison' at 29.46%.[81] However, there were mixed reactions to this method of deterrent.

> ***"My dad's van was broken into, and the criminal was in prison for three months before being back out and robbing again. They need to think about rehabilitating and retraining criminals."***

> ***"I don't think prison is the right way. They get more contacts and more skills."***

There were others who took part in the qualitative research that felt if there was more of a crack-down then it would help to break up some of the organised gangs that are carrying out these crimes.

Some tradespeople suggested that thieves should have to carry out community service that directly helps tradespeople, in order to see who they were actually affecting with their crime. With the skills gap growing each year, could it be a conceivable option that criminals who steal tools learn a trade themselves as part of a reintroduction to society, and to steer them away from future criminal activity? In the words of one focus group participant, they could 'build a better life'. However just 10% of tradespeople surveyed selected this as their favoured method of punishment. [82]

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SUPPORT

INTRODUCTION

Many tradespeople feel the need to take the welfare of their tools into their own hands in order to protect their livelihood. There are many initiatives and emerging technologies which can help them to protect, track and log their tools.

Additionally, initiatives to support the reduction of tool theft need to be cost-effective, as the financial and mental impact of tool theft is already a burden.

VAN VAULTS

Van Vaults, despite their name, can actually be used in a variety of locations, with specific designs for on-site purposes. Opportunist thieves especially are looking for a quick and easy job, which leaves less time to be detected. The aim of installing a Van Vault is to deter them and minimise the risk of theft, protecting expensive tools and equipment.

Van Vaults were mostly agreed to be a deterrent to criminals as part of the focus groups, as they took more time and effort to break into. However, they didn't stop the initial damage to the van and aren't fail-safe.

> ***"Van vaults can even be cracked now with an angle grinder."***

However, as the locking system sits deep within the body of the box protected by a hardened steel plate, it claims to provide advanced protection against drilling, cutting and picking.

Van Vaults are also able to be registered by inputting the product serial number. This allows owners to secure their keys, ensuring only the registered owner can order replacement sets.

When combined with a van cage to add an additional layer of protection, a Van Vault can be an effective solution to deter criminals from quickly clearing out a van.

VAN MANUFACTURER RESPONSIBILITIES

13% **of tradespeople had to pay for damage to repair their vehicle.**

With lock technology now widely available, as in the Van Vault, it is surprising that there isn't greater uptake by van manufacturers.

"Vans are so easy to get into, you could open some with a tin opener! It doesn't take much to put thicker metal around locks."

The annual rate of thefts involving vans in the UK could rise to over 20,000 vans by 2030, according to Comparethemarket.com. The insurance comparison site predicts that 12,000 vans will be stolen in 2022, which is a rise of 169% over the last five years.

Tradespeople are having to invest in additional security in order to avoid their van being compromised. Often the cost of having to repair damage to a van adds to the financial burden on tradespeople who have been affected by tool theft.

"I felt like leaving the doors open at night just to prevent damage to the van."

Each van type can have differences in their weaknesses, so covering those areas with extra security such as deadlocks could provide additional assurance. However, it must be noted that such precautions are costly and aren't fail-safe.

"I looked into more deadlocks, but the cost dissuaded me. You find yourself spending even more money."

Another issue with van security that has been known to be exploited by thieves is remote locking systems. Criminals can intercept the signal from the van's key fob and enter the car without a key or breaking in.

"They see a locked box with an easy key."

One way to combat this is by using a RFID blocking wallet or a faraday bag, which stops your key's signal from being used against you.

Alarm systems can be a fault in van security systems. They can be rendered defunct when the 'peel and steal' method of break-in is applied: the process of cutting the back or side of the van open and using one's own body weight to break into the van. There are now multiple alarms on the market created specifically for vans, some so complex they even require expert fitting.

If van manufacturers provided better security solutions in the first instance, then it would save tradespeople from having to go to additional and often expensive lengths in order to improve the security of their vehicle.

TRACKING TOOLS

There needs to be a clear approach as to how tracking devices are used in the case of theft. Technologies that allow tools to be remotely disabled are effective as they render a tool worthless for the holder, and this type of innovation – if used widely enough – could dissuade criminals from taking tools. However, tracker tech that doesn't utilise such a feature could tempt tradespeople to track down their stolen gear and put themselves in harm's way or at risk of prosecution for reclaiming stolen tools with force.

One other issue with many tracker devices is that they only work via Bluetooth. This is useful in making the devices smaller, however, they have a limited range. Some trackers do have integrated GPS and connect to cellular networks to report their location. However, this means they have to be bulkier and are therefore more difficult to attach to individual tools.

> ***"Manufacturers could put more smart tech into tools, like a mobile phone. For example, you could track it, or not be able to use it without a code."***

SMARTWATER

Recent years have seen the development of 'traceable liquids'. The most notable of these is SmartWater. Each drop contains millions of invisible datasets that can be encoded with information ranging from production details of a safety critical part, to the address of the burgled premises when sprayed onto and recovered from an intruder.

SmartWater claims that through the use of proprietary predictive software, the team are able to track the movement of Organised Crime Gangs as they move through regions, providing early warnings to their clients. However, this information isn't available to the general public as of yet.

ONE KEY & TOOL CONNECT

The Milwaukee remotely controlled battery 'One Key' is billed to stop tool theft and get complete control and visibility across any job, crew, and location. Real-time alerts help to enhance power tool security, preventing loss and expensive setbacks. It works through community Bluetooth tracking, barcode scanning and geofencing. However, the issue with this technology currently is that it isn't available on all tools from Milwaukee, meaning you can only control a certain amount of devices in your toolkit.

DeWalt has similar tech powered by phone: Tool Connect uses Bluetooth to let its users easily connect to and control their tools via the Tool Connect app or online. It can be used to protect, monitor, assign and keep track of tools across multiple locations. It is possible to name, log and monitor all assets to help effectively manage tool inventory. Though the technology can only track tools and identify where they were last seen within a 30-mile radius, it can alert tradespeople when tools leave allowing for them to be remotely disabled. The range is also limited - though there is an 18v battery with the tracking capability that can be used across multiple tools.

TILE TRACKER TAGS

Small Tile tags can be attached to equipment, and tracked through the Tile app. Anyone who has the tile app installed essentially becomes part of a wider tracking network.

If a tool is lost, stolen, or misplaced, the Tile tag will ping every single Tile app it encounters, and that phone will then send the location of the ping to the Tile servers.

Therefore the Tile app allows tradespeople to locate their tag when it is in the vicinity, with extra functionality provided by additional tradespeople using Tile in the vicinity. As such, the limitations of the technology are that it depends on other tradespeople in the area utilising the app and the possibility that criminals will quickly prise the Tile tag off the tool being utilised.

ABAX 'MINI2' TRACKER

The Mini-2 is used to relocate equipment; it is used by sticking it onto the exterior of the tool and has an extensive six-year battery life. However, the appearance and fixing method of the tracker make it a highly visible and easily removable anti-theft device for criminals. Unlike with cellular trackers, for example in mobile phones, the Abax MINI2 tracker has a limited range of visibility using Bluetooth.

TRACKI

Tracki is an example of a tracker that doesn't rely on Bluetooth. The downside of these trackers however is their larger size, shorter battery life, and required monthly fees for the connection. The upside is that it is possible to track the location more precisely, and there isn't a need to rely on the tool being in the range of another Bluetooth device running the app needed.

The larger size does mean that these types of trackers are better suited for inside a tool bag, attached to bigger tools or placed inside a van. As with the MINI2 tracker, this technology is not integrated into the tool and leaves the possibility open that a thief could locate and destroy the tag before it could be used to find an accurate location.

TELL TVL

The 'Tell TVL' initiative asks those who have had their vans stolen or items stolen from their vans to report full details including images on their website, in addition to reporting the crime to police. By securely recording detailed data, as agreed with the National Business Crime Centre, Tell TVL aims to create the UK's first real-time national database capturing the scale and nature of van crime.

NATIONAL DATABASE

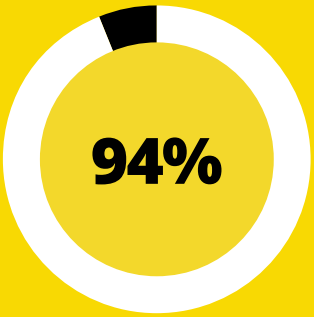
> *"Make the tool worthless or too hot to handle."*

There are some efforts to create a database that anybody can use in order to log tools. The purpose of this is two-fold: firstly to make the stolen tools 'too hot to handle' and searchable by members of the public who are doing due diligence on second-hand tools. The second purpose is to make the repatriation of tools to their owners a possibility if they are recovered.

Immobilise is the world's largest free register of possession ownership details. It works in conjunction with two 'sister' sites: the Police's National Mobile Property Register (NMPR) and CheckMEND, publicised as the only ownership registration service supported by all UK police forces, as well as the Greater London Authority.

Immobilise can be used by members of the general public and businesses to register their valued possessions or company assets. All registered items and ownership details are viewable on the Police national property database: the NMPR.

This online checking service is said to be used thousands of times each day by UK Police forces to trace owners of lost and stolen property. However, as the service is free, advertising budgets are not available. This means that the service is not as widely adopted as it might be. If more second-hand buyers knew to check it before purchasing a stolen tool, the checking service has the potential to become more effective. The demand for stolen tools currently drives the market; lessening the sales of 'hot' tools by consumers should reduce the rates at which tools are being stolen.



According to our research, 94% of stolen tools are never recovered.[83]

Using a database such as Immobilise could help reunite more tradespeople with their stolen tools: lessening this statistic.

There are moves to open 'tool libraries' too, however, currently, these are geared towards DIYers rather than holding specialist stock.

FORUMS

A quick check on most search engines brings up a multitude of results for forums and chats designed to allow tradespeople to let off steam regarding their experiences of tool theft, and to share tips and advice on how to guard against it.

Some of these groups also alert others to activity within their areas in order to let tradespeople know they should be vigilant.

SURVEILLANCE

Surveillance can be a deterrent for potential thieves, but also a way of identifying criminals who have decided to steal tools or break into vans, garages, homes, and sheds.

"I don't trust anybody now. I have two different systems for CCTV, alarms and no-one can get to my workshop without going past my window."

Ring doorbell footage is increasingly being shared among forums in order to alert people to criminal activity. Social media groups on spaces such as Facebook, or messaging services such as Whatsapp are used to create small community groups, for streets, neighbourhoods and entire villages. This is akin to the 'Neighbourhood Watch' for the digital age, allowing people to quickly share information such as their camera footage so others can see identifying details such as how the criminals look and quickly report them to the police.

On The Tools

TOOL & VAN THEFT GROUP

The On The Tools tool and van theft group gives all of its members a place to share their experiences, seek advice, and post about missing tools or vans.

INSURANCE

Specific tool insurance products do exist to support tradespeople to cover tools should they be stolen. Many tradespeople we spoke to did have reservations surrounding insurance; largely due to lack of trust that insurance policies would pay out.

There is a need within the insurance industry to build up more trust with tradespeople who may have felt let down by insurers in the past.

Insurers can show their dedication to good practice in order to make this commitment to tradespeople. Simply Business is a certified B Corp insurer, recognising that it is meeting high standards of verified performance, accountability, and transparency.

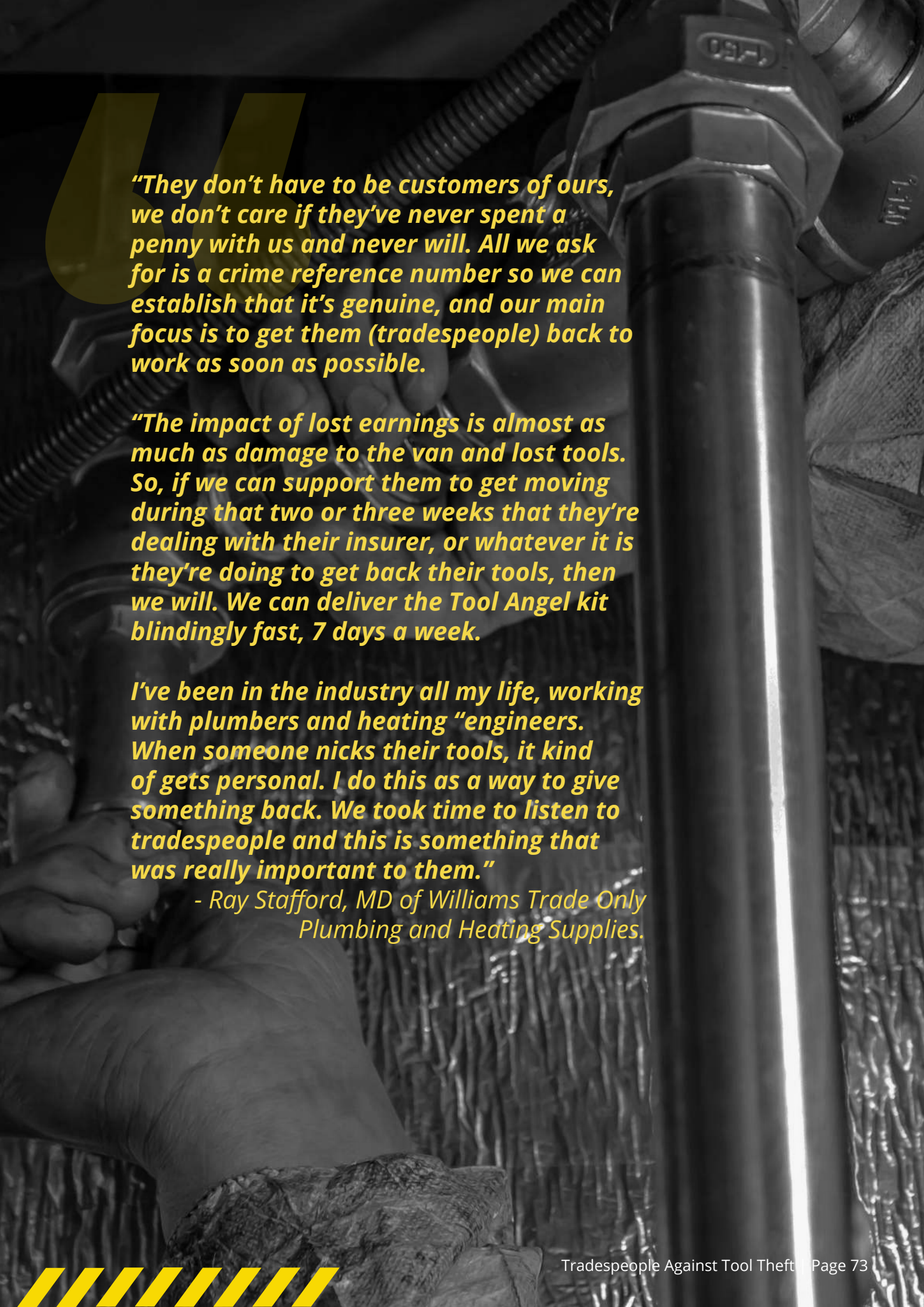
Tools insurance can help cover replacement costs, if tools are lost or damaged, often due to theft, fire, flooding, or misplacement. It makes the difference between taking on a job and pausing work for thousands of tradespeople every year, who rely on their tools day-to-day. (See PART 1: Support for more information on insurance.)

"It's a business cost. I'm insured, my van's insured and my tools are insured. It's a logical step, because if my tools were nicked I'd be working in a supermarket – there's no way I could replace them all at once."

"Insurance costs more in the long run, but with insurance, it stops you losing time after it happens - which I learnt the hard way."

TOOL LOAN SCHEMES

There are tool loan schemes being put in place for tradespeople who have had their tools stolen. One such scheme is 'Tool Angel', run by Williams Trade Only Plumbing and Heating Supplies.



"They don't have to be customers of ours, we don't care if they've never spent a penny with us and never will. All we ask for is a crime reference number so we can establish that it's genuine, and our main focus is to get them (tradespeople) back to work as soon as possible.

"The impact of lost earnings is almost as much as damage to the van and lost tools. So, if we can support them to get moving during that two or three weeks that they're dealing with their insurer, or whatever it is they're doing to get back their tools, then we will. We can deliver the Tool Angel kit blindingly fast, 7 days a week.

I've been in the industry all my life, working with plumbers and heating "engineers. When someone nicks their tools, it kind of gets personal. I do this as a way to give something back. We took time to listen to tradespeople and this is something that was really important to them."

- Ray Stafford, MD of Williams Trade Only Plumbing and Heating Supplies.

THE CON

CLUSION

CONCLUSI

The findings of this white paper, though far from exhaustive, point us to a number of conclusions from which we have drawn relevant recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE TOOL THEFT IN THE FIRST INSTANCE:

1. IMPROVE POLICE CLASSIFICATIONS AND REPORTING

As part of our research, we made Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to 45 police organisations to uncover the scale of the tool theft problem for UK tradespeople. When making FOI requests to the police, the issue around the classification of tool theft and crime recording became apparent. At present, it does not have its own classification and is labelled alongside general theft or theft of a vehicle. Therefore, there are no current provisions in place for accurate reporting and recording of tool theft.

One of our key recommendations is for a standardised approach to logging tool theft offences, so the scale of the issue can be more accurately reported.

As we've uncovered throughout this report, tool theft has a variety of consequences ranging from loss of income and inability to work to poor mental health. Due to the wide and often long-lasting consequences, it is reasonable to expect that it should have its own classification.

Another issue is reporting of the theft by tradespeople, as almost a quarter of tradespeople surveyed stated they did not report the experience to the police.[84] Reporting should be encouraged, for the benefit of all.

With government backing for better reporting on the tool theft epidemic, police organisations could be better able to examine where regionally is the worst-hit and other key trends. Once the records of tool theft are more accurate, the level of sentencing can be better considered.

- **Reclassify tool theft in crime reporting, so the true scale of the problem can be recognised by the police authorities and government agencies**
- **National campaign to encourage tradespeople to report the crime**

IONS

2. REVIEW PUNISHMENTS SURROUNDING TOOL THEFT

- **Review of punishments for tool theft from government; extent of punishment to be considered in the context of loss of earnings**
- **Make tool theft a specific crime with its own punishments to act as a deterrent**

When we asked tradespeople about punishments for those who commit the crimes, responses sought harsher retribution in the form of imprisonment and compensation.

At present, the punishment for theft can result in imprisonment or fines. Respondents, however, were dissatisfied with how investigations of tool theft are carried out, and the consequences for those who have eventually been found guilty.

With most tradespeople feeling the best punishment is financial compensation for the cost of tools and work, similar to that of the classification recommendation for reporting, it is reasonable to expect tool theft should be made a specific criminal offence.

As with any offence, the onus should be on the perpetrators to change their behaviour, not those impacted. Measures such as community service should be considered, as well as rehabilitation.

3. GREATER INNOVATION FROM VEHICLES AND TOOL MANUFACTURERS

Whilst progress has been made to increase security measures in vehicles as technology evolves, this is on a case-by-case basis dependent on the manufacturer of the vehicle.

Many tradespeople stated that even new vans required additional security measures such as adding deadlocks to deter and prevent theft. Van manufacturers should actively work with police authorities and tradespeople who have experienced tool theft to understand trends as to how the theft occurs, and to enable advances in security to be made to manufacturing processes.

A similar situation occurs with tool manufacturers. Some tool manufacturers have made great progress in adding trackers to tools and continue to innovate in this area.

However, once again, this is on a case-by-case basis; it is not a uniform and industry-wide approach and with some limitations in the offerings available. Tool manufacturers should continue to innovate to enable all tools sold to be easily tracked for the benefit of tradespeople.

- **Van manufacturers to proactively work with police authorities, government and tradespeople who have experienced tool theft from vans, to innovate new products with security measures**
- **Tool manufacturers to continue innovating and make all products trackable in event of theft, working with tradespeople to understand how to make this a simple process**

4. BETTER UTILISE TECHNOLOGY

Technology providers to work with local authorities to share information about stolen tools

The concept of smart technology marking, smart security and trackers were felt to be viable solutions for tradespeople to use to help prevent the issue of tool theft.

Existing tracking technology is commonplace in electronics –in the case of phones which can be tracked and found – and can act as additional security to prevent the resale of stolen goods.

Whilst our research identified that some tradespeople use smart technology marking, smart security and trackers, this practice was not revealed as industry-wide.

Companies who provide these services should work with police and neighbourhood watch groups in local areas so alerts can be put out when thefts occur, as a warning for tradespeople to be vigilant.

5. PROMOTE A SUITABLE AND EFFICIENT NATIONAL DATABASE

Over the years there have been many attempts to create a national database of tools, however, respondents did not identify a suitable solution at present.

Immobilise, the world's largest and free register of possession ownership, has integration with all UK police forces and should be promoted to tradespeople as an existing solution. Consumer awareness around this should also be increased to better equip and prevent the public from buying second-hand tools.

The motion to bring in a Bill requiring persons selling second-hand tools online to show the serial numbers of those tools in searchable advertisement text and for connected purposes has not yet become legislation, and the ease of selling stolen tools online has been identified as part of this study. Further support to get the Bill passed and for change to be made is needed.

- **Industry-wide promotion of Immobilise as a service for tradespeople to use to improve the recovery of stolen tools**
- **Promotion to consumers of Immobilise to help prevent the purchase of stolen tools by the public**
- **Further action by the government to get the Bill passed to require persons selling second-hand tools online to show serial numbers**

6. DEVELOP A RESPONSIBILITY AROUND SECOND-HAND TOOLS

- **Industry-wide awareness campaign to inform tradespeople and consumers as to what to look for when buying used tools**

Our research uncovered that both tradespeople and consumers are purchasing second-hand tools. Whilst checks are being made, it is clear that more can be done to educate both groups about what to look for when purchasing used tools.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT TRADESPEOPLE IN THE EVENT OF TOOL THEFT:

Along with preventative measures to make it more difficult for criminals to steal and resell tools, and awareness around what to look for when purchasing second-hand, offering tradespeople support following tool theft is critical.

7. SHARING EXPERIENCES FOR BETTER MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

The construction sector has a notable reputation for poor mental health, respondents shared various mental health issues arising from tool theft as part of this study, ranging from increased anxiety to longer-lasting impacts. Mental health support for tradespeople who have experienced tool theft is needed.

Tradespeople as part of this report identified that they worry about tool theft daily.[85] When conducting the research many tradespeople thanked On The Tools for allowing them to share their stories, and for connecting them with others with similar experiences as it helped them to feel less alone with the issue. Respondents within this report informed us that tool theft can act as a trigger for poor mental health and in severe cases has resulted in a contributing factor to suicide.

Mental health support is available for tradespeople and should be promoted and made readily available following the experience of tool theft specifically.

- **Promotion by government bodies and charities of mental health support that is available for those who have experienced tool theft**
- **Raising awareness of mental health support available, and encouraging peer-to-peer examples of tradespeople who have received support to help to reduce the stigma**

8. PROVISION OF TOOL INSURANCE THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF TRADESPEOPLE

- **Creation and/or promotion of an affordable, fair and robust tool insurance product that meets the needs of the UK's tradespeople**

Tool insurance, whilst not universally adopted by respondents, is a way to give tradespeople peace of mind knowing that their livelihoods are protected and could help to mitigate some of the daily worries they have about the issue.

Whilst insurance is only triggered to support the policyholder following the theft, respondents identified that it could make the experience less stressful once it has occurred if it were to be improved.

Tradespeople as part of this study shared the limitations of insurance products they have previously experienced and provided insight into their requirements for this type of product. There was a desire from respondents for a tools insurance product from a trusted brand that is simple to access and use, with low excess and adequate cover, a fast claims process to get them back on the tools quickly, and cover overnight at home on the driveway or street to prevent the need to unload tools every night.

FINAL WORD

Tool theft is crippling UK tradespeople. In fact, 68% of respondents within this report identified that this is something they worry about daily.[86] The cost of living crisis may make the situation worse.

Both consumers and tradespeople are aware of how big the problem is, and the On The Tools community is outraged by the growing issue.

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT

In order to set a path for improvement which aims to reduce the number of tool thefts occurring across the UK, the construction industry needs to unite, discuss and take action on the issue. Key stakeholders must all be committed to making an impact and playing their part.

A change of behaviour when purchasing used tools needs to come from within and outside of the industry - we need greater checks and awareness in order to achieve that.

With a growing skills gap and lack of entrants into the industry, the reputation of construction is a pressing matter. With the industry being known for tough working conditions, poor mental health, and the crippling issue of tool theft, this all contributes towards the negative reputation and will hold the industry back.

Through the sharing of this report with industry leaders, authorities, charities and brands across the sector, we hope to raise awareness of the importance of this issue to encourage change.

Join us and unite with UK tradespeople against tool theft.

Get in touch and let us know any questions, comments or thoughts on the matter:
press@onthetools.tv

CHROME VANADIUM
VANADIUM

OUR SUP

PORTERS

A WORD FROM OUR PARTNER

Simply Business

About Simply Business
With more than 800,000 customers, Simply Business is one of the UK's biggest business insurance providers. We're proud to offer simplicity, choice and value – making it easy for small businesses to get the cover that's right for them.

An accredited B Corp for our positive social impact, we use the power of data and technology to create the best possible experience for our customers.

Beyond providing tailored insurance, Simply Business firmly believes in the importance of supporting the self-employed – whether that's campaigning for an end to tool theft or keeping customers updated on the latest information affecting their business.

Insuring almost a quarter of a million tradespeople gives us a unique insight into the challenges facing the trade. UK construction has more self-employed workers than any other industry – over 800,000. Their importance to both our economy and communities can't be overstated.

Tradespeople, like so many other business owners across the country, continue to battle the likes of rising costs, surging energy prices, and material shortages, all while continuing their recovery from the impact of the pandemic.

But there's another challenge unique to the industry that continues to threaten the livelihoods of tradespeople in the UK, and it's been prevalent for years – tool theft.

Protecting so many tradespeople also gives us a sense of responsibility. After witnessing the disruption and devastation caused by tool theft, in 2019 we felt compelled to act on behalf of our customers and the wider trade community.

Petitioning for change

We first campaigned to Stamp Out Tool Theft in 2019 because we recognised an opportunity to make a difference – to influence legislation and start a conversation around the problem at a national level. Among the media, government, and emergency services.

Backed by the voices of tradespeople, we started a petition that called for tighter regulation in the selling of second-hand tools and greater fines for those convicted. It was signed over 31,000 times and was one of the fastest growing in the UK, before being closed with just 24 hours notice due to the 2019 general election.

Back then, Boris Johnson was campaigning on a pledge to get Brexit done, while reports of a novel coronavirus were trickling out from China.

Three years later, small businesses continue to deal with successive crises as best they can – but tool theft has remained a constant problem for tradespeople and the construction sector.

> ***Our belief has stayed the same. More must be done to tackle the problem.***

Wide-ranging impact – from finances to wellbeing

We've seen the profound impact of tool theft first-hand. With those on the receiving end often forced to take time off work, the financial hit – and longer term repercussions on future business – can inevitably affect wellbeing.

At the very least, in the midst of a tough cost of living crisis, there needs to be wider recognition of the fact that tool theft is a problem for tradespeople of all types.

And further than that, discussion should centre around how tool theft impacts everyone – when it happens, it affects the economy at large in terms of lost working days.

But what now?

In 2019, we called on the government to introduce tighter regulation when it comes to selling second-hand tools, plus greater minimum fines for those convicted of tool theft. We still believe these would be reasonable steps in the right direction.

But in the absence of meaningful legislation, we can all play our part in stamping out tool theft. From insurers, to van manufacturers, to tool suppliers, we all have a role to play.

At Simply Business, we're proud to partner with On The Tools to produce this white paper and reignite our campaign to Stamp Out Tool Theft.

We hope that by shining a light on the scale and depth of the problem, revealing the true stories of those affected, and offering practical support for the community, we can contribute positively to change.

Alan Thomas

UK CEO, Simply Business

SPOTLIGHT ON

About Jewson
Jewson is one of the largest building merchants within the UK, with branches from the Scottish Isles to Penzance, so you are never far from your local branch. Wherever you are working, your local Jewson is there to reduce the hassle, through providing a great service, expert advice, competitive prices and the highest quality of materials. Whether you wish to pop in branch, give them a call or buy online through their click & collect or click & deliver service, they can be there for you anytime, anywhere.
Since opening its first branch in 1836, Jewson has expanded to offer a wide range of supplies for all trades, including building materials, roofing and landscaping. From the everyday essentials, such as bricks and timber to specialist equipment. You can also find kitchen and bathroom showrooms nationwide, as well as a trusted Tool Hire service. In addition, tradespeople can also take advantage of Build Aviator, to help take the stress away through support with estimating, compliance and scheduling.

What do you think tradespeople can do to help prevent tool theft by themselves?
The most important thing to say from the outset is that tradespeople can't be expected to prevent tool theft without a greater level of support from the wider sector and beyond. This is such a major issue affecting lives across our entire industry and we all need to play a role in tackling it.

Unfortunately, there's no silver bullet when it comes to stopping someone stealing tools. There are, though, a number of things tradespeople can do to help reduce the chances of their tools being stolen. First and foremost, it's vital to make sure that, when they're not being used, tools are kept in a secure place. It may sound obvious, but this doesn't just apply to moving them out of your van overnight, it's just as important to keep them safe during the day too and while on site.

Padlocked safes and locked pad-bolts are a must. Today, you can even get padlocks which feature biometric fingerprint locking to add an extra layer of assurance. Alarms, added CCTV, lighting and signs which let intruders know that your site is protected by CCTV may help deter would-be thieves.

The other key thing we need to stress is to make sure tradespeople are registering their tools, which can be done through platforms such as Immobilise.com. Unfortunately, this won't necessarily stop tools being taken in the first place, but it will help to combat the issue in the long-term.

If anyone tries to sell a registered tool to a reputable buyer (who should be checking if that person is the registered owner), it should be immediately flagged as stolen and refused.

> *There are also benefits from an insurance perspective too – so tradespeople should always register every time they buy a valuable tool, and shout about it too. They should consider putting stickers on vans and tools which make them less appealing to an opportunistic thief.*

What support can your brand offer tradespeople who have experienced tool theft?
The devastating thing about tool theft is that it's not just about losing a piece of equipment. Often, it results in the ability to complete a day's work. It can affect your relationship with customers as well as putting an added strain on your finances.

Jewson offers a 15-minute click and collect service during operating hours on a comprehensive range of tools, as well as next day delivery. This helps to ensure that the work doesn't have to stop in the event of stolen equipment.

Tool theft is impacting the livelihoods and mental health of the UK's tradespeople. What support do you think they need in this area?
We know that your tools are your livelihood. They're your ability to go out and earn a living. This makes tool theft far more than simply a 'work problem', and tradespeople need access to support which helps them deal with the far-reaching impact it can have on their mental wellbeing.

Jewson is partnered with Band of Builders, a registered charity that offers financial and emotional support for tradespeople and their families across the UK who are dealing with life's most challenging circumstances.

We're getting better as an industry at facing up to mental health, but there's still more we can do to support each other. This is where charities like Band of Builders are making a huge difference.

How do you think we can come together as an industry to stamp out tool theft?
Everyone has a part to play in preventing tool theft. The responsibility cannot rest solely with the victims. From a community perspective, there has to be greater collaboration between local policing, tradespeople, and second-hand retailers, such as pawn shops – which is often, frustratingly, where stolen tools end up back on the market.

This will help police track down stolen items quicker and leave criminals with nowhere to go. By cutting down their chances of making money from stolen items, we can reduce the temptation to commit the crime in the first place.

For more information about Jewson, visit www.jewson.co.uk.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Van and tool theft is a significant concern for many businesses across the UK. At Ring, we understand the impact that this type of theft can have on one's livelihood and peace of mind. That's why we're always looking at ways to help tradespeople protect what matters most to them.

Earlier this year, we launched a dedicated initiative to shine a light on van and tool theft, providing helpful security advice and exclusive offers to help prevent these incidents from happening. Our aim is to help deter such thefts through education and the use of home security devices and services. The initiative has proved a huge success, with hundreds of tradespeople reaching out in recent months to learn more about what they can do to keep their van and tools safe.

Protecting what matters most
There are a number of simple yet effective security precautions that you can take to best protect your valuables against theft. Here are our five top tips:

Park smart
When parking your van, we recommend parking with the rear or side van doors against a wall in a busy, well-lit area. If possible, always store your van in a garage overnight to keep it safe and out of sight.

Lock up
Theft can take place in seconds. That's why it's so important to always lock your van doors and close the windows, even if you're just away for a minute or two. You can also consider fitting a slam lock onto your van, which automatically fastens when a van door is slammed shut.

Keep valuables out of sight
When locking up your van, always ensure any keys or fobs and valuables, such as mobile phones and bags, are out of sight. We also recommend removing all tools from your van overnight and securely storing them away until you need them next.

Security mark tools
Once tools are stolen, recovering them can be challenging. Security marking your tools using either an etching kit or a forensic asset-marking kit can help identify your stolen goods. Your tools can also be registered on approved tools and asset databases to help the police identify and return stolen property.

Install smart security
Setting up smart security devices to protect the front driveway or garage where you park in the evening can provide peace of mind. For example, smart Video Doorbells and Cameras will send real-time notifications to your smartphone or tablet whenever motion is detected, so you'll always be the first to know when there's someone on your property.

Making neighbourhoods safer
Ring was founded with the mission of making neighbourhoods safer, offering a wide range of simple, affordable, whole-home security devices to suit customers' differing needs. As part of this core aim, Ring is committed to highlighting the impact of van and tool theft while helping tradespeople protect their belongings.

ENDNOTES

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5 Appendix 1B-ii
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27 (Office for National Statistics, 2022)
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33 Ibid.
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46 (Health and Safety Executive, N.D.)
47 (eBay, N.D.)
48 (Facebook, N.D.)
49 (Oxfordshire County Council, N.D.)
50 Appendix 1B-iii
51 (Google, N.D.)
52 ibid.
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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 (Mates In Mind, N.D.)
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61 Appendix 1E-ii, Appendix 1E-iii
62 (Construction Industry Training Board, 2021)
63 (National Health Service, 2018)
64 Appendix 1E-iv
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66 Appendix 1E-iv
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68 (Office for National Statistics, 2021)
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70 (Doughty, 2021)
71 (Crown Prosecution Service, 2019)
72 (Statistica, 2021)
73 Appendix 1F-iv)
74 Appendices 8 onwards
75 Ibid.
76 Appendix 1F-i
77 Appendix 1F-ii
78 (Cambridgeshire Constabulary, 2022)
79 Appendix 1F-iv
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To find our Appendix and Bibliography, please visit:
https://www.onthetools.tv/tradespeople-against-tool-theft-whitepaper/

On The Tools

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