

As the weather turns more wintry, Suffolk Constabulary is offering advice and crime prevention visits to help keep your heating oil secure.

Many farms, commercial premises and householders will start using more oil and filling up tanks as the temperature gets colder and the nights get longer.

In 2016, there were 70 incidents of heating oil theft, so far in 2017 there have been 52 cases reported.

Sgt Brian Calver from Stowmarket police said: "Heating oil is an expensive outlay, yet many people take few or no steps to secure their tank. Criminals will try their luck with tanks where they can easily remove thousands of pounds worth of fuel. A few simple security improvements can deter opportunists."

General tips to protect your fuel include:

- Check oil levels frequently so you are aware if anyone has tampered with your supply, and consider an electronic oil level gauge which sets off an audible alarm in your house if the oil level drops below a quarter full.
- Fit a good quality locking device to all fuel tanks – a high quality closed shackle padlock will make access using bolt croppers very difficult.
- Consider perimeter security for the whole tank, such as a metal cage or fencing. Even a prickly hedge may help deter thieves. Remember, however, that the oil tanker driver will need to access it.
- If you're installing an oil tank or considering repositioning it, they should ideally be situated within sight of nearby occupied buildings. It may not be so aesthetically desirable, but the more remote the better the opportunity to access the tank without being seen.
- Consider appropriate lighting around the tank so you can see and anyone can be seen.

Sgt Calver continued: "We also need communities to be vigilant and report any suspicious activity. If you spot something unusual at a friend, neighbour or relative's house, or at a nearby business premises, call police on 101 or dial 999 if a crime is in progress.

"This also includes calling police immediately if you are cold called by someone trying to sell you heating oil at a discounted price. It is likely the individual will be a rogue trader so you should turn them away. Always buy from a reputable source, and once your delivery has been made make sure you resecure your tank and gates. It's also worth bearing in mind heating oil sold by rogue traders may well contain other contaminants that could damage heating systems, leaving householders with significant repair costs and no recompense as a result of using unscrupulous suppliers."

Anyone with information about oil theft should contact Suffolk Police on 101 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Help us keep our communities safe.

Police advice on a variety of subjects can be accessed via <https://www.suffolk.police.uk/advice>

To report something, or to otherwise contact Police, use the link <http://www.suffolk.police.uk/contact-us>

Alternatively call **101** for non-urgent matters.

Always call 999 in emergencies, or if an immediate police response is required

The Police Connect Team