

# **PRESS RELEASES FROM LANCASHIRE CONSTABULARY**

## **Lancashire Constabulary cracks down on rural crime**

CRIMINALS targeting the Lancashire countryside will once again be targeted by police as part of a week-long crackdown on rural crime.

The operation, codenamed Firecrest III, will begin next week, 14<sup>th</sup> October, and will see officers from Lancashire Constabulary conducting extra patrols; targeting suspected offenders; making visits to farms and rural businesses to offer crime prevention advice; and hosting community meetings as well as providing a police presence at rural events.

This summer the annual Rural Crime Survey revealed that 'agri-theft' across the UK has reached a five-year low, with the drop credited to the widespread use of high-tech security tractors and effective rural police operations such as Firecrest.

But while countryside thefts have dropped by almost 20% in a year, rural crime still cost Lancashire £1,300,000 in 2012.

Rural residents are being urged to continue making security a priority on their farms, businesses and homes, deterring both organised gangs and opportunist thieves as much as possible.

Throughout next week specialist wildlife officers and representatives from the Environment Agency, United Utilities, HMRC and other agencies will carry out enforcement activity including anti-poaching patrols, warrants and checks on places like scrap metal yards, local auction marts, ports and other key locations.

Roadside checks will also be conducted throughout the week to identify travelling criminals and to deter the theft of scrap metal, livestock and plant equipment.

According to the Rural Crime Survey, the trend for items most commonly targeted by countryside thieves remains largely unchanged from last year with farm tools, ATV/quad bikes and oil/diesel cited as the most frequently stolen.

Farmers, landowners and gamekeepers will be actively encouraged to work with police by becoming members of Farm Watch and Rural Watch schemes or by signing up to a system allowing them to receive crime alerts and messages about police activity.

Commenting on the operation, Detective Superintendent Andy Webster from Lancashire Police said: "Fortunately rural crime is relatively low in Lancashire but whilst the number of offences is small, the value of items stolen can be significant.

"The impact of crime can also be severe, particularly amongst communities who already feel isolated like rural communities, which is why we are determined to take action."

"The most common type of offences in our rural communities include fuel, scrap metal and vehicle or plant theft; burglary of homes and outbuildings and offences like poaching and hare coursing. These are the type of activities we have been cracking down on as part of Operation Firecrest.

"I hope our activity, and that of our partner agencies, will send out a clear message to offenders that rural crime won't be tolerated here in Lancashire. Offenders will be caught and put before the courts. I also hope our activity will go some way towards reassuring our rural communities that we are taking action to address their concerns."

The operation has received backing from the National Farmers Union which has been working with officers to identify crime hotspots and encourage its members to join watch schemes and sign up for crime alerts and crime prevention messages.

Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner Clive Grunshaw said: "It is vitally important we engage our rural communities and work together to tackle the specific issues facing those living and working in rural areas.

"Rural crime is decreasing in Lancashire, and I am committed to keeping it that way. This is why operations such as this are so important, to highlight to residents living in these communities the help and support available to them and to send a clear message to the criminals – crime will not be tolerated, and Lancashire Constabulary is committed to bringing offenders to justice.

"Firecrest is not just a week-long initiative; it is a long-term commitment to addressing rural crime in Lancashire and the problems it brings. And it is not just something the police are focussed on – we will be working closely with our partners such as the National Farmers Union, Environment Agency, United Utilities, RSPCA and the RSPB, as well as the local communities, to ensure the county's rural areas remain safe places to live and work."

Anybody who would like to speak to an officer to discuss concerns about rural crime or report suspicious activity that they have seen and not yet reported, should contact local police on 101.

Anyone who wants to sign up for crime alerts and news about rural or farm watch schemes can do so on the Lancashire police website simply visit <http://www.registration.lancashire.police.uk/registration/>