

Late last year we asked you to come up with ideas for storing your ammonium nitrate more securely. Here are the best of them

How to ensure your fertiliser remains yours

Great stuff for making crops grow, ammonium nitrate, but deadly in the hands of terrorists, extremists and others wanting to make a bomb. When it is mixed with other key ingredients it is nearly as explosive as TNT. And, given that it sits around on farms in large quantities and is usually unguarded, it's not too difficult to steal.

But that will all have to change. The government wants farmers to secure their fertiliser in a way that makes it harder to steal. And they will have to keep tabs on it so they know if any has been stolen.

What happens if they do not? The government has made it clear that it could ban ammonium nitrate and force farmers to use less explosive (and less effective) alternatives, which has happened in Northern Ireland and Australia.

A much better idea is for farmers to find ways of securing their fertiliser. However, there aren't any established techniques for doing so, other than obvious things like putting it in a barn and locking

the doors. And machinery manufacturers have not had a chance to come up with off-the-shelf equipment to do the job either.

So we asked you to come up with your own designs, not just for making it more difficult for intruders to open the bags, but for ways of covering them up that would reveal any attempt to tamper with them.

To add a bit of spice to the process, Assured Food Standards offered three prizes to the best designs: £500 cash plus a £100 voucher towards farm assurance membership for the winner; £350 plus £75 voucher for the second prize and £175 plus £50 voucher for the third prize.

Here are the three winning ideas. All are simple and cheap and could be used together or separately.

1 John and Anna Booth, Mold, Flintshire

John and Anna Booth already have a system for making their fertiliser hard to get hold of. They bought second-hand security panels and made them into gates, which were



hung on their existing shed. They say this is both cheap and simple.

2 David Craig, Much Wenlock, Shropshire

If anyone managed to get into his locked fertiliser store and take a couple of bags, says Mr Craig, the chances of him noticing would be slim. So he came up with the simple idea of using a spray marker to draw a continuous line around the bags as they are loaded into the store. If a bag is removed, the line is broken and it would be noticed immediately. As a double-check, he also writes on them how many bags there are in each batch.

3 James Reeve, Southam, Warwickshire

Why not order your ammonium nitrate fertiliser, suggests Mr Reeve, and then hide it behind subsequent deliveries of lower-risk sulphur products? The sulphur products are used first so there should not be any logistical problems of the different types of fertiliser being in the wrong order.

Terrorists would have to move a significant number of shield bags to get to the ammonium nitrate, which would require forklifts and involve a lot of time and noise.

GOOD IDEA, BUT...

Readers made suggestions that included good ideas but the judges felt would not be practicable.

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- * Removing the labels from bags so that terrorists wouldn't know what was in them. Good idea, but EU regs would not allow that.
- * Using urea instead of ammonium nitrate. Possible but urea is less efficient than AN and is a significant producer of greenhouse gases. It is also more hygroscopic – it absorbs moisture from the air, making it difficult to store.
- * Ordering it just before you need it. Another possibility, although this would stop farmers benefiting from off-season discounts.
- * Want to know more about securing your fertiliser? Go to www.secureyourfertiliser.gov.uk david.cousins@rbi.co.uk



Humble ammonium nitrate makes for a powerful bomb.

WINDOW ON THE WEB

* Many of the most notorious terrorist attacks of the past 15 years were carried out using fertiliser as a base.

See www.tiny.cc/manchester for a film of the 1996 IRA bomb in Manchester.