

Rural Watch Scotland initiative launched at the Royal Highland Show



Police Scotland, NFU Scotland and Neighbourhood Watch Scotland launched their Rural Watch Scotland initiative yesterday at the Royal Highland Show, Ingliston.

'Rural Watch Scotland' is an extension of the Neighbourhood Watch concept and a product of the *Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime (SPARC) designed specifically for the rural communities of Scotland and aims to bring all the benefits of Neighbourhood Watch to rural communities irrespective of location, size or demographics.

The objectives of Rural Watch Scotland are to:

- Reduce crime and the fear of crime by providing the right information, to the right people, at the right time,
- Encourage people to think about safety and security for themselves, their neighbours and their community,
- Improve community cohesion and well-being,
- Work in partnership with national and local service providers to develop more resilient communities that are better prepared against threats, intentional or unintentional, such as crime or extreme weather.

In meeting these objectives effective communication between partners and consistent engagement with rural communities is vital. Neighbourhood ALERT, a targeted, two way messaging system specifically designed in the UK for the purposes of community engagement will play a central role in providing consistent, locally relevant and inclusive communication with

people living and working within a rural setting.

The last six months has seen the establishment of a local Neighbourhood ALERT administrator network across all areas of Police Scotland.

Rural Watch Scotland encourages people to sign up to receive alerts and advice by email, text or voicemail from local police officers and other approved information providers. Keeping communities informed about crime and other threats in their areas can help prevent crime, keep communities and residents safe, and the response to these alerts can help catch criminals or allow communities to better prepare to deal with local issues.

To sign up to receive local ALERTS users simply click the green JOIN button on the Rural Watch Website – www.ruralwatchscotland.co.uk. Experience provides that people who sign up to Rural Watch Scotland and thereafter apply the advice they receive will be less likely to be a victim of crime and be better prepared for other potential harm.

Signing up for local ALERTS does not require anyone to join or start up a formal Rural Watch scheme, however the benefits of joining or establishing such a local community group are always available.

Superintendent Gavin Robertson, who chairs the SPARC Group said: “The availability of a national Rural Watch Alert platform has been one of the main aims of SPARC since it was formed in 2015. I am pleased to see the service come to fruition.

“I am confident that this direct messaging system will benefit rural communities and I urge farmers, foresters, rural businesses and residents as well as those who regularly visit the countryside for leisure activities to sign up to receive relevant information about rural crime in their area. I am grateful for the funding from Neighbourhood Watch Scotland,

NFU Scotland and Police Scotland to bring a consistent messaging service to all rural communities across the country.”

Jamie Smart, NFU Scotland’s Legal and Technical Policy Committee Chairman, commented: “NFU Scotland has been working closely as part of the SPARC group to reduce rural crime in all its forms, and we are starting to see some real benefits from this partnership.”

“This new platform is designed to allow faster communications, alerting those in the rural communities of problems or potential problems in their own area. This service is free, can be tailored to your own requirements and only takes minutes to register.”

“We would urge all of our members to register their details to stay informed of all of the latest developments in their area.”

Detective Chief Inspector Ronnie Megaughin, Safer Communities, Police Scotland said, “We are delighted that the Rural Watch Alert messaging system is now available across Scotland. Rural Watch messaging system is an excellent facility to get relevant information to rural residents about crime and incidents in their local area and I am grateful for the support given by Neighbourhood Watch Scotland in getting us to this point”

Alan Dobie, Chair of the Neighbourhood Watch Scotland Board said: “We are delighted to be working with our partners to bring the benefits of strong, resilient and well connected communities to all the rural areas in Scotland”.

*The Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime (SPARC) is a multi-agency partnership that includes Police Scotland, NFU Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Business Resilience Centre, Scottish Government, NFU Mutual, Crimestoppers, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

and Neighbourhood Watch Scotland.