

Homes being targeted when occupants are home, data finds

Incidents of house breakings where residents are surprised by perpetrators while they are relaxing at home are becoming more common according to claims data from Dial Direct Insurance.



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"Robbers are becoming more brazen. We are noticing a definite upward trend in the number of incidents where houses are robbed when people are home. Typically, people are surprised at night, just before bedtime, or while sleeping. This modus operandi was apparent in the recent spate of house robberies in KwaZulu-Natal," said Bradley du Chenne, senior executive of Dial Direct Insurance.

Du Chenne continued: "Insurance claims information is often a good indicator of what's happening out there. Our claims data also shows that the value of losses has increased steadily in the past two years. Commonly, it is easily-portable goods that are stolen, such as jewellery, electronics, computers, laptops, money and firearms. In some instances, vehicles are stolen during a house robbery.

"Reports suggest that criminals work in organised gangs. In one incident, the residents of the home were held hostage by a few perpetrators while the rest of the gang made off with stolen goods and the family car. It was only once the hostage had been notified by their accomplices that the vehicle had crossed the border that the residents of the home were freed.

Obstacles during conventional burglaries

Du Chenne believes that burglars face a number of obstacles during conventional burglaries, such as activated alarms, locked security gates and beams. When people are home, their guard is down, and security is sometimes neglected - making it easier for robbers to gain entry.

"Just as car thieves have taken to hijacking vehicles because it's easier to overpower car occupants than it is to steal a locked car fitted with all the latest security devices, so house robbers seem to consider it easier and less risky to break into a home when people are there than when the house is securely locked up and the alarms are on," Du Chenne said.

SAPS information points to this criminal mindset. According to analyses by the police and published in SAPS annual reports, 75% of home robberies occur at night. In 56% of cases, robbers gained access to the homes by forcing the victims to let them in. In over 40% of cases, the perpetrators gained access to the premises and surprised the victims, and in 4% of cases, the victims were tricked into allowing the robbers into the home, not realising that they were criminals.

The most vulnerable time is 9pm to midnight

Du Chenne urged people to remain security conscious at all times - even when they are relaxing at home, and when they retire for the day. The most vulnerable time is between 9pm and midnight.

"Invest in the best security you can afford, such as electric fencing, beams, security gates, and an alarm system. Use them. They are good deterrents. Make sure all windows throughout your home are closed and that security gates are locked at

night. For your safety and the safety of your loved ones, fit a strong security gate so as to block off the sleeping quarters from the rest of the house," he advised.

Dial Direct also recommends the following:

- Fit all access doors with security gates and install burglar bars on windows;
- Cut away tree branches and remove other things that could be used as leverage for getting into the house;
- Install an alarm system to provide an early warning of a security breach;
- Sign up with a reputable armed response company if you aren't signed up with one already;
- Make panic buttons (linked to your security provider) readily available around your home;
- Install motion detection security lighting on the outside of your home and in your garden;
- Get to know your neighbours and exchange phone numbers. Be in contact with them should you see or hear anything suspicious;
- Conduct thorough checks on the domestic workers and gardeners you employ. Ask for IDs so that you can make copies. Check their previous employment references and do security clearances at the police. House robberies are very often based on inside information.
- Never open the door to anyone you are not expecting. Robbers are known to use a ruse or impersonation to get you open the door;
- Never leave keys under doormats, flowerpots, mailboxes or other "secret" hiding places - burglars know where to look for hidden keys.

If you are surprised by a robber in your home, try to stay calm and don't resist. The 2012 National Victims of Crime Survey (NVCS) survey found that people who resist are more likely to suffer injuries. Your possessions can be replaced but your cannot be. Hit the panic button and call the police as soon as you are safely able to do so.

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