

## SAFE COMMUNITY



David Thomas

## BE WISE TO BURGLARIES

**AS** we approach the winter months, there is traditionally a seasonable increase in burglaries, particularly in the more rural areas of the Algarve. This is probably because there are fewer tourists in the coastal resorts during this season and, therefore, criminals look for areas which may be more attractive to them. Now is the time to ensure that your home is protected.

During the first six months of this year, there was a 9% decrease in burglaries compared with the same period of 2011. Recently, the GNR have apprehended gangs suspected to have been involved in a series of burglaries.

Despite this good news, now is not the time to be complacent. The factors that give rise to burglaries, such as the poor economy - a large number of unoccupied empty properties, criminals' dependence on drugs, high unemployment, low or the absence of unemployment benefits - are still with us and, as such, burglaries could increase unless preventive steps are taken.

**Some facts:**

- The majority of burglaries are committed by opportunists
- In the majority of burglaries, the culprits gain access through the rear of the property
- Very few burglaries lead to violence
- The contents most sought after are cash, electronic equipment, especially computers, gold and other metal items

**Insurance**

Without stating the obvious, it is important to insure your property and its contents. Some insurance companies have policies requiring that you have an alarm installed and good security locks fitted.

Often these types of policies provide a better service in the event of claims. Coupled with this, for certain valuable items it makes sense to keep a list of their make, model and serial numbers in the event you need to make a claim. This also helps trace the property in the event that it is recovered resulting from a police operation. Always

keep a print out of this list in case your computer is one of the items stolen!

**Reporting suspicious activities**

Yes, I know I have said it many times but I make no apology for repeating it again - report suspicious activities! During the last couple of weeks, there have been several burglaries detected with stolen property recovered, in part as a result of the reporting of suspicious activities by residents.

"My GNR" provides an easy way to report such activities or, alternatively, simply email or telephone your Safe Residence Programme (SRP) team.

This does not mean that they will visit you unless necessary, but they will share this information with their investigative units to see if is part of a jigsaw puzzle that detects a previous crime or prevents a new one occurring.

**Advice to estate agents and property management companies**

The housing market is such at present that properties are on the market for longer



PHOTO: CTACK/ISTOCKFREEIMAGES

periods, often unoccupied. Consequently, the longer the period the property is unoccupied, the higher the chance that it will be broken into. Once sold, it is a known fact that homes are more likely to be targeted upon moving in of the new owner's possessions.

This gives rise to a common question - how can the home be secured at the time of trying to get it sold?

During a sales period, a criminal posing as a potential buyer may use the opportunity to "case the property" by making note of valuable contents as well as easy points of entry.

Although this is not such a

problem here in the Algarve, it is still wise for estate agents to minimise these opportunities by taking down the names, personal information, and other details of viewers with proof of identity. The individual's disposition should also be noted. If the individual sounds suspicious, aggressive or pushy in one way or another, you are completely entitled to refuse a viewing.

Care should be taken in advertising properties in windows, not to give the location of the property with photos showing easy points of entry. Property management should use these guidelines in respect of the letting of properties. Believe me, the owners concerned will appreciate these precautions.

**Making your home safe**

Protecting your home against burglaries does not mean turning it into a fortress. The

key guidelines should be that the protection should reflect the risk and should be cost effective. Remember, security is only as good as the weakest point, so there is no point having a top quality front door with security locks if the rear door is made of aluminium with a standard lock. Physical security should always be matched by common sense security practices as outlined in the table shown.

The main components of a good home security system that should be considered are: having a security alarm with 24 hour monitoring, perimeter fencing that makes it more difficult for a person to enter the grounds, perimeter gates, external lighting, good quality security locks fitted to entrance doors, quality windows which are lockable and, where needed, protected by sturdy shutters or grills. Some tips include using timer switches in conjunction with energy saving light bulbs so that a light or radio can come on when it gets dark, and fit dusk 'til dawn lighting which comes on automatically when it gets dark.

Lastly it is important to get independent and professional advice concerning home protection before investing in measures which may not be required or present poor cost effectiveness.

**|| Top 10 tips to prevent burglaries**

1. Lock doors and close windows when going out.
2. Ensure that the security alarm is set
3. When going out at night leave external and internal lights on in the kitchen/lounge, hall and a bedroom
4. If your car is parked in the driveway, ensure it is locked
5. Do not leaving keys to your property in obvious places such as under flower pots, or on display through windows
6. Do not leave tools or bikes in the garden. If practical keep them in a locked outbuilding.
7. Keep swimming pool pump rooms locked.
8. Ask a neighbour to keep an eye on your property in your absence and inform the SRP Team
9. Do not open your door to strangers
10. Report suspicious activities in your area to police

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David Thomas is a former Assistant Commissioner of the Hong Kong Police, consultant to INTERPOL and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. In October 2011 he formed Safe Communities Algarve an on-line platform here in the Algarve to help the authorities and the community prevent crime. 913 045 093 | www.safecommunitiesalgarve.com

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