

Burglars on the prowl for hot property this summer

Householders are being urged to take extra security precautions over the holidays, with research showing backyard burglaries spike in summer.

Crime statistics for the two years to March 2015 showed theft from a dwelling was the only major offence to record an upward trend.ⁱ That's despite the fact break-and-enter offences are on the decline, signalling an increase in opportunistic thefts from backyards, carports, garages, sheds, driveways and verandahs.

Understand Insurance spokesman Campbell Fuller advises holidaymakers to be vigilant over summer to avoid falling victim to burglars.

"Over the holidays, Australians live outdoors and expensive possessions – such as bikes, scooters, tools and gardening equipment – may be left lying around, making it all too easy for thieves to make off with your valuables," Mr Fuller says.

Mr Fuller says summer is also a prime time for more brazen burglaries, thanks to doors and windows being left open due to the warmer weather, or when entertaining.

"Thieves often target house parties because they can easily enter the front door, there's usually loud music so no one can hear them, and they can take valuable and easily accessible items such as handbags, laptops, keys, wallets and phones," Mr Fuller says.

"According to the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC)ⁱⁱ, it takes only two minutes to break into a home and the average burglary is over in 10 minutes. However the financial loss incurred from stolen possessions and property damage can be long lasting."

With a 2015 AIC reportⁱⁱⁱ indicating that improvements in security are the number one reason perpetrators believe property crime is dropping, Mr Fuller says householders can take simple steps to reduce their risk of becoming a victim of crime this summer.

"Being prepared and taking sensible precautions will help you protect your home and belongings, regardless of whether you're entertaining at home, going away on holiday, or simply ducking out to the shops," he says.

Top prevention tips:

- If you're having a party, keep the front door locked and have your guests ring the bell or call your phone to avoid unwanted party guests
- A security audit will help you identify ways a burglar could enter your home. Many locksmiths and security companies offer these services. They may recommend improvements such as back-to-base monitored alarms, better locks and security screens for doors and windows
- If you're a renter, ask your landlord to invest in window locks and deadbolts on external doors

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- Don't hide keys outside your home for friends and family members
- Cut back bushes near doors and windows to reduce hiding places
- Thieves may use your own equipment to break in. Lock away any ladders, gardening equipment or work tools
- Avoid tempting thieves. Break down the packaging from recent expensive purchases, such as TVs or laptops, and place in recycling bins. Boxes left outside simply advertise what's inside your home.

In addition to taking security precautions, Mr Fuller says householders should create an inventory of their possessions, and consider re-evaluating their home and contents insurance requirements.

“Research has shown more than eight out of 10 homeowners and renters believe they’re underinsured and it’s likely you will have acquired new belongings during the year, not to mention at Christmas.”

For more information:

Download Understand Insurance’s home burglaries fact sheet: <http://bit.ly/1IRFPUx>

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Case study – Josh Strawczynski (picture available upon request)

Josh Strawczynski, 31, knows all too well how important it is to take extra security precautions to protect your home from thieves. Last month, Josh's Melbourne apartment was broken into and robbed while he was at work.

A thief stole all his electronics including his TV, X-Box, computer and speakers, along with his DVD collection and an expensive bottle of scotch – a 30th birthday present. The crook then loaded up all the equipment into a shopping trolley and wheeled it away in broad daylight.

"It wasn't until I returned home from a friend's place that evening that I discovered the break in," Josh said. "But as soon as I walked in the door and saw the TV was missing and its bracket had been ripped from the wall, I realised immediately what had happened."

Police have since charged a man with the break-in and were able to return most of Josh's possessions. However they weren't able to recover his scotch, computer or Xbox. Fortunately, for these items, Josh has insurance.

"I've always used a broker for insurance because they spend time with you and come to your house to accurately assess your needs and make sure you have the right cover for you," Josh said.

Since the incident, Josh has taken several security precautions including installing a motion capturing security system in his apartment and installing electronic password-operated door locks that can be set and reset remotely. Not only do additional security measures provide extra protection, they may also reduce his insurance premiums.

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ⁱ BOSCAR NSW, Recorded Crime Statistics, released 2 June 2015

ⁱⁱ [Australian Institute of Criminology, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, October 2014](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Australian Institute of Criminology, Property Crime Drop: The Offenders View, Feb 2015](#)

