

Time for tinsel, time for thieves Baubles, bubbly and burglaries Burglary claims up 20% – AA Insurance

Auckland – 16 December 2008 – While many New Zealanders are preparing for their Christmas holiday, AA Insurance reports that 45 percent feel apprehensive about leaving the house because of the risk of break-ins.

This concern is based on reality, as AA Insurance has received 20 percent more burglary claims over the September-October-November period compared with the same three months last year.

“It’s not surprising that so many of us are wary about leaving our homes unoccupied,” says Martin Fox, Deputy General Manager, AA Insurance. “Burglaries have increased significantly and many people are still not putting basic measures in place that would easily make their homes more secure.”

According to the AA Insurance 2008 Home Security Index, which surveyed 1,567 New Zealanders aged 18-75, some 44 percent sometimes go out without turning on the alarm. Some 36 percent of people have left the front or back door unlocked when they shouldn’t have, 29 percent say they don’t lock windows and 27 percent don’t lock deadlocks when they probably should.

One in four New Zealanders (26 percent) admit leaving spare house keys in obvious places like under doormats or pot plants.

“This is like leaving a welcome mat out for thieves,” says Martin. “Obvious places around the household entrance are among the first places a thief will check before breaking into a home, but a quarter of New Zealanders continue to do this.”

The most common security measures at the houses of those surveyed are deadlocked external doors (30 percent), a peephole in the front door (29 percent), security door (25 percent), an alarm system (26 percent), window locks (25 percent) and a safe or other secure area for valuables (9 percent).

People considered using an alarm the most security effective measure against thieves, with 38 percent of people listing it as the best way to keep their house secure. That said, 40

percent of people say they don't investigate or call police when they hear a house alarm going off.

Other methods considered most effective for securing a home are arranging a house sitter (36 percent) or asking someone to collect your mail or keep an eye on their home (20 percent).

However, the most common actions people actually took when leaving the house for an extended period such as a holiday were asking a friend, neighbour or cleaner to collect the mail and keep an eye on the home (43 percent), activating an alarm (21 percent), arranging a house sitter (12 percent), leaving a light on (11 percent) and leaving devices such as lights or a sprinkler on a timer (11 percent).

Encouragingly, 72 percent of people say their answering machine would not let burglars know the house is vacant. 78 percent say they usually lock their house doors every time they leave the house, no matter for how long.

Some 43 percent of those surveyed have experienced a break-in, and there's evidence that neighbourhood communication networks are still strong, with 82 percent having warned their neighbours that a thief was at work in the area.

And while Christmas is just over a week away, AA Insurance is already receiving claims for stolen Christmas presents -- even before the gifts have been wrapped.

"Perhaps it's the economic situation, but we have claims coming in already for wrapped presents stolen from underneath the Christmas tree, and for alcohol and festive food, as well as Christmas shopping," says Martin.

"Our advice is always lock your home, set the alarm and don't take risks such as leaving a window open for the cat. And many security firms will provide stickers to advertise that your home is protected, which makes a burglar think twice."

To help secure your home, it's a useful exercise to stand outside and think how you would get back in if you had locked yourself out.

"Think about how you could use the ladder left out next to the house, or whether an open window could provide access. Forcing windows is a very common way in for thieves. If you can find a way in, so can a thief!"

“Remember that thieves are opportunistic and will choose the easy way over a challenge every time. If there’s anything you can do to make it more difficult for a thief, do it: you could be saving yourself a lot of stress.”

AA Insurance’s Top Five Tips for the Christmas Holidays

(Based on claims it receives each year)

1. Remember the basics – there’s no point having an alarm and deadlocks if you don’t use them.
2. Tell your neighbours if you have a break in, and report suspicious activity to police. That way you’ll all be more aware and careful.
3. Engage deadlocks so thieves can’t carry items out through your front door. But don’t leave them locked when you’re at home as they can be a hazard in a fire.
4. Store easy-to-carry expensive items such as jewellery, MP3 players and laptops out of sight so thieves can’t see them, and consider installing a safe.
5. Think like a thief: how much of a challenge is it to get into your home without a key? If you can find a way, so can a burglar.

About AA Insurance

AA Insurance was launched in 1994 and is a joint venture between New Zealand Automobile Association and Suncorp-Metway Limited.

AA Insurance has over 300 staff servicing 130,000 plus customers and managing almost 300,000 policies. Over half of those policies cover motor insurance risks including cars, bikes, caravans, and motor homes, and the remainder are house and contents insurance.

In 2008, AA Insurance was a finalist in the unlimited/JRA Best Places to Work Survey in the medium-large workplace category, making it one of the top places to work in New Zealand.

AA Insurance Limited has an A+ (Strong) insurer financial strength rating given by Standard and Poor's (Australia) Pty Ltd on 17 May 2008. For further information visit www.aainsurance.co.nz

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