

Businesses must step up security for the Festive Season

Crime continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing South African business. As companies brace for the unfortunate onslaught of crime that characterises the festive season, Auto & General Business Insurance is urging business-owners to step-up their security measures.

According to LeRoy Munetsi, Executive Head of Auto & General Business Insurance: “Crime has a debilitating impact on local businesses. The World Economic Forum’s Global Competitive Report 2013/2014 ranks South Africa 141st out of 148 countries in terms of the costs of crime and violence, indicating that crime is costing businesses significantly.

“In the report, crime and theft are ranked the seventh most problematic factor for doing business in South Africa. From fraud to theft, businesses are having an increasingly tough time trying to protect the assets, and personnel, that enable them to keep operating.”

According to Munetsi, Auto & General’s claims data indicates that vehicle theft and hijacking, theft of computing equipment, and portable devices such as laptops are the main crimes impacting local businesses. The theft of office equipment and furniture as well as stock theft are also common.

Unfortunately, companies that are identified as soft targets by syndicates often fall prey to repeated attacks because the criminals realize that equipment is generally replaced within a few days in order to keep businesses running. Losses can be significant when fully quantified as it’s not just replacing stolen vehicles, equipment and stock that cost businesses money; it’s the loss of productivity as well.

“When you consider a small business losing all of its computers, resulting in staff not being able to do their work, or a plumbing company losing one of the vehicles used to get to jobs, you can understand why the costs of crime can be significant enough to cripple a business,” says Munetsi.

Although criminals prefer to operate at night when the chances of confrontation with employees and security staff are reduced, the prevalence of theft and robbery at business premises during the day is escalating as security measures are sometimes less stringent.

“We have also heard of criminals posing as a potential customers and quickly snatch phones and valuables lying around on counter tops or tables while they are being ‘served’ by unsuspecting personnel. The losses are usually only noticed after the criminal has long gone,” says Munetsi.

To protect their businesses and their personnel, companies need to equip themselves to fight crime with an integrated approach.

This requires implementing a combination of security measures such as, good quality perimeter fencing, lighting, external passives, infrareds and beams, CCTV systems, intruder detection systems, solid locks, glass protection (against smash and grabs), good building access control and well-trained security guards.

Employees should also be made aware of the risks, and be trained to follow security procedures and take safety precautions.

“Having strict security measures in place is especially important over the festive season when robberies and burglaries at business premises tend to increase. If you are shutting shop for the holidays or if you are only going to have fewer staff manning the fort, make sure you consider your security situation and take the necessary steps to protect your business,” says Munetsi.