

safe community



by David Thomas

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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. He has recently formed *ISECA The Independent Security Agency* here in the Algarve to help authorities and the community prevent crime.

A Christmas message to criminals

As many readers will know, the winter season, in particular the approach to Christmas and the New Year, is a time when criminals have their own way of celebrating, by turning their attention to residential property crime.

Here in the Algarve it is no different.

In the summer months, criminals are more active along the coastal towns and beaches, whereas in the winter months they turn their attention to in-land properties particularly those which are foreign-owned.

So let's make it a Christmas for criminals to remember by taking simple and easy precautions that protect your home and therefore reduce the opportunities for criminals to celebrate.

The above rationale was in fact behind the timing of the launch of *Safe Communities Algarve*. There was a clear need to provide a "one stop shop" of crime prevention information and support services.

So in protecting your home, the first action you can take is to visit www.iseca.net and click on the *Safe Communities Algarve* page.

This week's feature therefore focuses on what more can be done to prevent property crime and includes timely advice from the GNR Albufeira which they have asked me to disseminate.

This is also downloadable from the *Safe Communities Algarve* web page.

Basically, the majority of property crime is carried out by opportunists and to a lesser extent by those who actually carry out some preparatory work beforehand. At present, there is no indication of a return to the type of violent indoor robberies that occurred in late 2009, although this does still occur in the north of the country.

Crime patterns, however, do change and although the current risk of indoor robberies is low, like all crime the situation is being monitored by police.

In terms of opportunist property crime, the most frequent means of access is through open windows when the property is unoccupied.

There is a simple message here and that is, before leaving your property, spend five minutes checking that windows and doors are closed and locked, lights switch on if at night time, cars locked if kept in a driveway or open car port, and of course not forgetting to activate your alarm when actually leaving the property.

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With gold and certain other commodities at an all time high, it is sensible to take precautions to protect jewellery and other gold items. Install and use a good quality safe and keeping valuables out of view from windows are two important tips.

It is important to create the impression that a property is occupied when in fact it is not. The majority of burglars do not want to be confronted by occupants for obvious reasons.

Ways to create this

impression are to use timers on lights and even radios, which can be set at variable times over an extended period. If the house is unoccupied over a longer period, then register it as an empty property though the GNR or PSP websites or by visiting your local police station and completing a simple pro-forma.

This is where having a helpful neighbour can be beneficial. A visit to your home just two to three times a week, drawing curtains and moving a car in a driveway are good ways of creating a "lived in impression" as well as checking everything is OK. The following is a timely crime prevention bulletin from GNR Albufeira which is also relevant to other areas as well.

The GNR Albufeira has just announced a series of measures owners of properties in remote areas should adopt to help prevent burglaries this winter. These should be adopted in conjunction with the *Safe Residence Programme* launched by the GNR:

-If you are away for long periods of time, make your property appear to be inhabited. Ask a friend or neighbour you can trust to open the shutters and curtains regularly during the day and turn on a few lights during the night

-Beware of the presence of strangers in the area as you arrive or leave home. Most burglaries take place from 7am to 9am and from 6pm to 8pm

-Avoid routine by entering and leaving your property at different times

-Avoid placing obstacles at the entrance to your property that could block the line of sight to the interior. Such obstacles include garden art decorations and vegetation that could also obstruct your view to the exterior (prune or clear shrubs and trees if necessary)



-Ensure the exterior of your property is well-lit, install motion-sensing lights in various spots around the exterior of the house and if you become aware of a stranger in the neighbourhood, call the GNR immediately

-Save the telephone number of your local GNR station as a speed dial in your mobile phone

-If you have just arrived

after travelling, avoid unloading your luggage in full view of others. If possible, unload in the garage to avoid strangers becoming aware of your belongings.

-If you install sound and light alarms in your property, ensure you test them periodically for your own safety and make sure your neighbours know what to expect when the alarms go off,

so that they can help you in case of danger.

Lastly I would like to reiterate what I said in my first article that preventing crime is a collective responsibility with all involved, the police, private security, civil government and us the community.

So let's all have a safe and enjoyable Christmas by sending a clear message to the criminals concerned.

■ This article is downloadable from ISECA's new community platform "Safe Communities Algarve" Go to www.iseca.net, click "Safe Communities Algarve" and then "Safe Residence Program". David Thomas, Director of ISECA – the Independent Security Agency can be contacted at 913045093 or by email at info@iseca.net. More about ISECA is available on its website www.iseca.net.

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