

Managing property properly

Security estates don't guarantee no crime: Homeowner safety tips

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"Although lifestyle estates and complexes offer greater security, crime is still a factor," says Verena Hulme, district manager (Cape Town North) for Fidelity ADT. Technology has, however, become a much more affordable option to use as part of the security solution for residential estates and security complexes. "Finding the technology that meets the security needs of the estate and is within budget is key," says Hulme.

Thermal cameras, for example, are proving to greatly enhance the security of estates. "These camera systems can warn security officers before an intrusion occurs. By using analytics on these cameras, the system can warn the control room when someone comes within a few metres of the perimeter and give the security officer time to react even before a breach occurs," explains Hulme.

She adds that a combination of thermal cameras and CCTV cameras is worth considering. Where the thermal cameras read heat signatures only, the CCTV cameras can assist in terms of identification, be it people or number plates.

"Electric fences can and should be incorporated and integrated with the cameras. When there is a disturbance at the electric fence, the camera focusing on that specific zone will kick into operation." An alarm will be triggered and the officer monitoring the cameras can watch that zone to see whether it is a legit breach and a response team can be dispatched.

"One of the cornerstones of a successful camera surveillance system," says Hulme, "is professional monitoring and responses to incidents. If this component is not guaranteed, the system is basically ineffective."

While perimeter security is a non-negotiable, she points out that very often crimes within estates are carried out with the assistance of a domestic staff member. “Make sure you have properly checked your domestic worker’s and gardener’s references and educate them on keeping your home secure when you are not there.” She adds that while security companies are constantly on the look-out for ways to improve their service to residents in estates, residents have to do their part too.

“You can’t rely on perimeter security alone,” she says. While perimeter security measures have been successful in driving down crime in estates, once criminals gain access to properties within estates they often have free reign. “This is because residents become complacent about their personal home security. Be sure to lock doors and windows and ensure vehicles are locked, even if parked in a garage. Don’t leave valuables lying around, particularly where they may be visible to a passer-by.” She adds that it’s important to always be alert when entering and exiting the estate.

“Criminals have targeted residents leaving from or returning to estates and hijacked them a few metres from the gates, if not right in front of the gates. The reality is that people relax and become less and less alert the closer they get to home. Don’t think that just because there is a security guard at the gate that you can become complacent. If you notice anything suspicious at the gate, rather don’t pull in right away but watch from a safe distance,” says Hulme.

“Report suspicious behaviour. A growing trend in estates is for a crime syndicate to move into a home for a period of time. During this time they monitor the behaviour of residents and initiate house break-ins in the estate before moving out. If you notice any suspicious behaviour, i.e. blinds or curtains permanently drawn, report it immediately to your security company.”

She adds that appointing the right security company is also paramount.

“The first step in appointing a security service provider is the undertaking of a comprehensive risk assessment. This will enable the estate manager and the team to devise a long- and short-term security plan, usually with assistance from a qualified consultant. The estate will then be able to determine who to employ, how many security officers are needed, and what the command and control structure will look like,” says Hulme.