

# What's under the tree can attract a very un-merry break-in

Shoppers warned to put purchases out of sight in the car

BY GILLIAN SHAW  
VANCOUVER SUN

This is the time of year when somebody besides Santa could be interested in what goes under your Christmas tree.

All that loot wrapped and ready to be picked up represents a bonanza for enterprising thieves who can turn this into a very merry season for themselves and a dismal one for their victims.

"Break-ins hurt, but people can be hurt even more this week," said Michael Jagger, president of Provident Security and Event Management. "Now is a busy time.

"Much of property crime is opportunistic and there is no shortage of opportunity now."

Police say Christmas shoppers can make it particularly easy for thieves, either by leaving bags full of presents in their cars while they continue to shop or stacking them early under the tree.

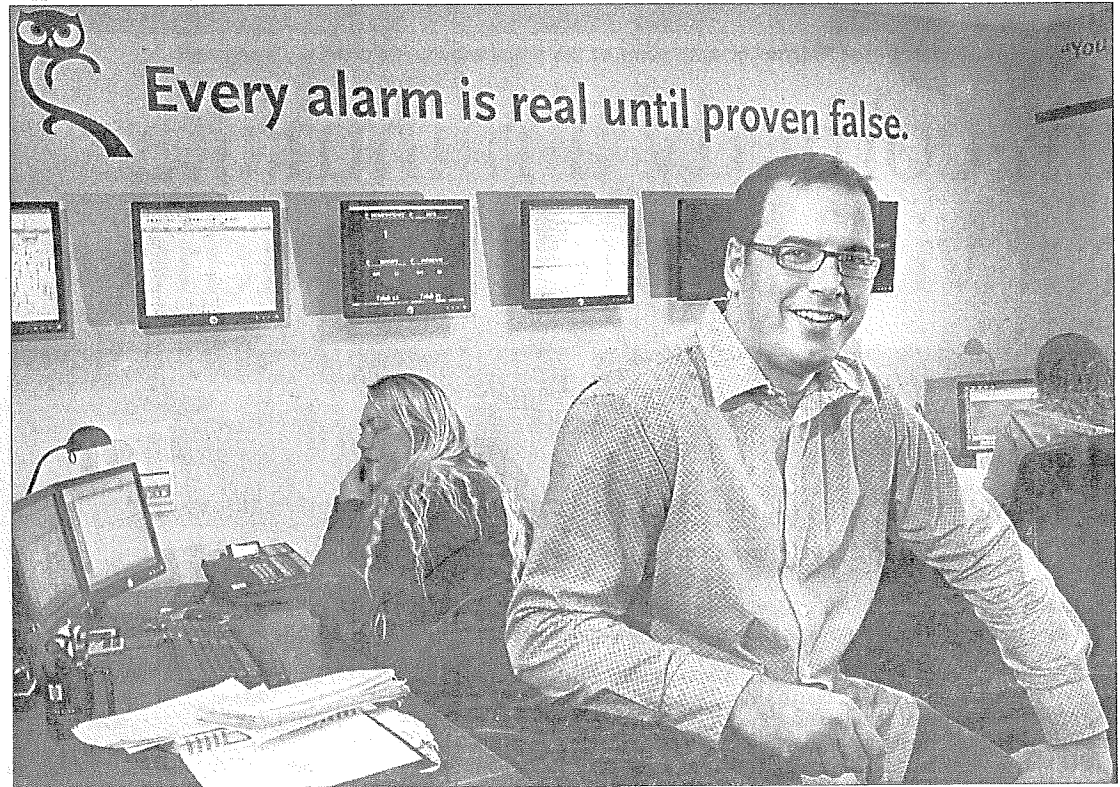
"It certainly can be a lucrative time for criminals," said Const. Tim Fanning of the Vancouver police department. "Houses can be full of brand new gifts such as iPods, cellphones, computers — all wrapped up and under the tree.

"Every year we caution people, if you have a bunch of gifts, tuck them away in the house.

"We appreciate you can't hide the new 50-inch TV, but if you went to Tiffany's and bought that lovely \$10,000 ring for your partner, make sure it is tucked away safe and sound until Christmas."

Fanning said one of the biggest problems at this time of year is theft from autos.

"People throw bags into the car and go back into the mall to shop," he said. "If you have to put them in the car, lock them in the trunk and make sure you don't have a trunk release inside that is easily accessible."



IAN LINDSAY/VANCOUVER SUN

Michael Jagger in the alarm monitoring control room at Provident Security and Event Management.

Fanning said sometimes thieves watch for people putting items in their trunks at the mall, but they usually won't go on a fishing trip through locked trunks.

"But if you have bags from shops filling the back seat, they are going to be breaking into your car," he said.

Fanning said 80 per cent of property crime is directly related to the city's drug problem. Thieves are looking for items they can easily convert into cash for drugs.

Even with alarms blaring, they are liable to run through the house, calculating they can grab enough to make it worthwhile before they are interrupted. In the case of some alarms, that interruption could be a long time coming.

Provident guarantees its customers,

within a certain area limited to Vancouver's west side, that its security personnel will be on their premises within five minutes of an alarm sounding.

That means security in the home has to stall would-be thieves for at least that crucial first five minutes.

"You have to make it five-minute proof," said Jagger. "Ninety-nine per cent of break-ins happen the same way — they kick in the front door, they use a screwdriver or crowbar and the door frame itself actually snaps.

"They go straight to the master bedroom, dump out the bedside drawers and check the closet for cash and jewelry."

For businesses, Jagger said one of the more common ways to gain entry is through the drywall.

"They go straight for the servers and take the computer equipment," he said.

People usually don't think of bolstering their security until they have a break-in, according to Mitch Verigen, president of the B.C. Association of Security Professionals and owner of Keyhole Locksmith in Langley.

"We have noticed an increase like we do every year at this time," he said. "We're definitely increasing the strength in a lot of doors and putting in extra security, whether it's plates or deadbolts or what not."

Verigen said the focus on such lucrative hauls as copper has put even the wiring in apartments at risk.

"They break in to steal the copper," he said.

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# Security firm does more than monitor alarm

**TECHNOLOGY** | It was 2 a.m., the Lower Mainland was locked in a snowstorm and Dwayne Stewart couldn't reach his company's premises in Abbotsford to open the doors to let his snow plough drivers in.

Instead, a staffer at Provident Security's operations centre in Vancouver did the job, opening the door by remote control to let the chilled drivers in.

Michael Jagger's company is among those combating the property crime trend and he is fighting it with a recently opened high-tech operations centre in Kerrisdale. Sophisticated controls allow his security specialists to monitor locked premises — from the apartment down the street to businesses across the country.

Remote access controls allow Provident to assist in everything from bail-

ing out owners who have forgotten their keys to guiding paramedics through an opened door to reach someone struck down with a heart attack in a 16th floor apartment.

"We can do it whether it is in Toronto or Tallahassee," said Jagger.

In the case of apartment buildings, Jagger said police and paramedics could find their way to help people blocked by secured doors with no one available to open them. And apartment buildings also face the problem of thieves getting keys or garage door openers for unfettered access through secured areas.

"Many buildings have so many keys floating around and no way to manage it," he said. "With our system if a clicker for the garage or a code gets lost, we can take it out right away so no one can use it to get in."

The system can also track who is gaining access and at what time.

Jagger said in most residential towers and commercial buildings the access systems are controlled through an onsite computer with a database that tells the system which access cards or other devices are allowed to open which doors and when.

If someone were to steal the computer with the database, it could contain all the personal information of residents or employees — and it would leave the system inoperable.

Employees or residents who leave may not always have their access removed promptly and unless the system is regularly backed up, it risks being lost in the event of a hard drive breakdown.

Jagger said Provident removes the

on-site computer, replacing it with secure communications equipment that links the commercial or residential site to its operations centre, with the system backed up to withstand any computer failure.

Stewart, who is a partner in Pacific Rim Services, had the system installed at the contracting company and he regularly calls on the Kerrisdale operations centre to help out with access problems.

"It's especially helpful in bad weather when people are trying to get into our facility and I can call Provident and say, 'Somebody is standing at the front door, can you let them in.'

"They can hop on a camera and see if there is one guy there, or 16 guys with a truck.

"It has worked out very well for us."

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