

## Computer thieves hit businesses

By Angela Bolowana

Take extra care over the Christmas holidays - that's the warning to businesses after an increase in computer thefts in Durban in recent months, with about 160 firms being hit in the Durban west area alone.

In the past two years, an average of five companies a week have been hit by computer thieves believed to be part of a syndicate operating in the city, according to a Hillcrest computer security company called Compusafe. ([www.compusafe.co.za](http://www.compusafe.co.za))

Police have confirmed that a number of companies, especially in the Pinetown area, have reported computer theft from their premises. Some have been burgled more than once, losing equipment worth thousands of rands.

Supt M R Pillay, of the Pinetown SAPS, said eight people had been arrested in connection with computer-related thefts.

Computer theft has also been on the increase in other parts of the country. Last month the Johannesburg offices of the South African Press Association were stripped bare of computer equipment, leaving the organisation unable to function for a period. Earlier, the offices of Gauteng Education Minister Mary Metcalfe were broken into and thieves made off with 50 computers worth R500 000.

Mr Ian Colls, the director of Compusafe, said about 160 companies had suffered losses in the Pinetown, Westmead and New Germany areas in the past year.

Other areas that had seen an increase in computer theft included Umhlanga Rocks, Mayville, Berea, Gateway Industrial, Mount Edgecombe, Jacobs, Bluff, Moberi and Queensburgh.

"The problem of IT theft has been going on for at least the last two years with about five companies being hit a week," he said. "The syndicate moves from area to area usually breaking into three companies close together at a time, or starting in a particular road and returning until they have pretty much cleaned out the area."

Colls warned companies to be extra cautious over the December period. "People need to do something before they go on holiday. Last year, about 120 companies were broken into over a nine-day period after they had closed for the holidays."

He also urged companies to be careful with technicians doing technical work on telephone lines.

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