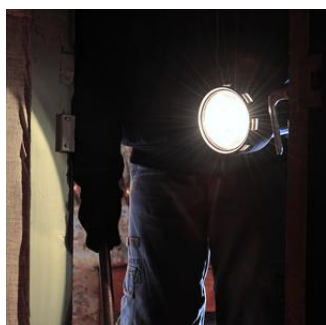




Prop. News

How to stay secure when the lights go out



1. It's no secret that South Africa is plagued by crime. Recent statistics show that homeowners are most vulnerable between 5am and 9am and 5pm and 9pm. Unfortunately, criminals now appear to be coinciding their activities with load shedding which just happens to take place during the already vulnerable 5pm to 9pm period.

Worryingly, it has come to light that those who utilise more 'sophisticated', electricity dependent features such as surveillance cameras, electric fencing, electric gates and electric locks are more likely to be targeted during load shedding. This is due to the fact that the back-up batteries linked to these systems don't always kick in, run flat or get knocked out by power surges, leaving homeowners vulnerable to criminal elements, particularly at night when it's dark.

With this in mind, it's probably not a bad idea to assess your home security system and consider integrating some non-electricity dependent security features. When performing such an assessment, it's best to adopt an 'outside - in' approach. Your entrance area and perimeter fence are a good place to start. Ensure that there are no large bushes, trees, bins or other items that can be used as cover by criminals near your gate and that the area is well lit by solar powered lights. Install gates which open quickly, remotely and if possible, feature multiple batteries which last longer than the average bout of load shedding. Consider topping your fence with some kind of deterrent such as spikes or razor wire which can at least slow criminals down should your electric fence be out of action.

Take a close look at the area between your fence and your home. Again, solar powered lights could be used to light up dark corners. Housing your dogs in kennels in this area is also something you could look at. Dogs are (generally) good at raising the alarm when something is out of place which should give you enough time to react accordingly. Solar powered motion sensor lights and wireless, long lasting battery powered motion detection beams are also features worth considering for this area. By all means, install an alarm system linked to your doors and windows but don't depend on it entirely. Each door and window of your home needs to be physically secured no matter how seemingly insignificant. This will probably take the form of burglar bars and security gates. For those who can afford it, there are elegant, 'invisible' window and door barriers which don't require electricity to function.

In terms of your interior, there's a lot to be said for traditional security gates and good, solid locks. You could also create a 'safe room' in your home. Your bedroom is probably the best choice in this respect as this is arguably where you are most vulnerable. These rooms can be secured by a variety of barriers including roller style shutter doors and retractable gates. It's also a good idea to have a remote panic button and/or your security company on speed dial in this room as well as a window which can be opened from the inside should you need to escape.

Lastly, establish what your insurance company's stance is on losses incurred should your electrical security features not function. For instance, most policies require that you have your alarm set and in working condition in order for cover to be in place. As such, it's vital that you read the fine print, check in with your insurance company and take all necessary measures to ensure as far as possible that you are covered.