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Tasmanians urged to lock up to keep out unwanted Christmas visitors

While Santa might be a welcome intruder next weekend, Tasmanians are being urged to take home security and safety seriously during the holiday break.

RACT Insurance data shows that claims for theft and home break-ins increase over the summer holiday period, with up to 17 per cent increase in claims across December and January.

Commonly stolen household items include jewellery, laptops and gaming consoles.

RACT Chief Insurance Officer Paul Sofronoff said many families will be heading off to relax with family and friends over Christmas and the school holidays, leaving their homes un-occupied and potentially susceptible to theft.

"During the holidays we often see a spike in home thefts and there would be few situations worse than returning from a relaxing trip away with friends or family to find your home and contents burgled," Mr Sofronoff said.

"Criminals take any advantage they can get and being complacent with the security of your property plays right into their hands.

"Prevention is still the simplest way to ensure your home is safe during the holidays, and that Santa is the only visitor that sneaks in unannounced.

"There are a number of safety tips for all homeowners to consider before they pack up and hit the open road, such as making your home look occupied, installing window locks and alarm systems, deadlocking all doors, windows, gates, sheds and garages, telling neighbours how long you're away for and not advertising your trip on social media," Mr Sofronoff said.

Mr Sofronoff also urged Tasmanians expecting the delivery of last-minute gifts to take measures to prevent opportunistic thieves from picking up a Christmas steal from their front door.

"If you're expecting a delivery, make sure you schedule it for a time you're at home, or make arrangements with the courier to leave the package somewhere hidden from view to opportunistic thieves passing by," he said.

Homeowners are also being urged to check that their home and contents insurance policies are up-to-date.

"While being security conscious can make a big difference, the worst can still happen," Mr Sofronoff said.

“Maintaining a home and contents insurance policy can ease the worry of the financial burden of a theft or break in. Make sure all of your details are current and that you have sufficient cover in place.”

RACF has provided a few simple security tips homeowners should consider over the summer period, including:

- **Thinking smart about social media** – It is great to share travel experiences with our friends online but thieves can use this information to target your home. Err on the side of caution and share your memories when you return.
- **Keep the garden tidy** – An unkempt garden with long grass and overgrown shrubbery isn't just a mecca for snakes - it can also give thieves great cover while carrying out illegal activities. A few days before you leave, make sure the lawn is mown and shrubs are trimmed.
- **Consider a house sitter** – A paid sitter, trusted friend, relative or neighbour keeping an eye on your home while you're away is a good idea. They can also collect your mail and any free newspapers that end up on your driveway so they don't stack up and give the game away.
- **Lock up the garden shed** – Chances are you may have tools in there that a thief could use to smash through one of your windows. Besides, there's nothing worse than coming home to find all your best equipment has been stolen.
- **Secure windows and doors** – Make sure your windows and screen doors have good locks. Consider fitting security screens where possible and install a deadbolt on your backdoor so it can be locked from the inside. If you have sliding windows or doors put a wooden or metal rod in the track so they can't be slid open even if the lock is compromised.
- **Secure your garage** – Some garages can be opened with a universal remote. If you have an automatic garage door, consider turning off its power supply to be on the safe side.
- **Don't hide a spare key** – Thieves know every hiding place in the book. Unless you're leaving a spare key with a trusted friend, neighbour or relative, take it with you.
- **Consider smart home technology** – Security systems have come a long way in recent years with the introduction of smart home technology. You can even access some surveillance cameras with your smartphone and have alerts sent to you if your alarm has been triggered. You can also use this technology to turn lights on and off at different times of the day and in different rooms to make it look like someone is home.
- **Unplug your appliances** – This will protect your electronics from any power surges that might happen while you're away. It could also reduce your energy bill.