

# DANGER ON THE ROAD

CASH-IN-TRANSIT HEISTS ARE ON THE RISE AGAIN. **ZIA TAYLOR**  
LOOKS AT WHAT CAN BE DONE TO KEEP SECURE DELIVERIES SAFER

It's an ignominious title to hold, but cash-in-transit robberies top the list of the fastest-growing types of criminal activity in South Africa, according to the 2016 national crime statistics, released by Stats SA recently. An increase from 119 incidents in the previous year to 137 in this year's report may not seem much, but it represents a rise of 15.1%. The really bad news is that up until recently, the number of crimes of this type had been falling: there was a 75% reduction over the 10 years to 2015.

Cash-in-transit heists have businesses worried both because of staff safety and the fact that increased security costs impact on the bottom line and cause price increases for customers.

## ARE CASH-IN-TRANSIT HEISTS PREVENTABLE?

Dr Hennie Lochner, senior lecturer in Forensic and Criminal Investigation Science in the Department of Police Practice at Unisa, believes that, while they may never be entirely preventable, there are certain measures that can be taken to minimise the risk.

"You must understand that they are not targeting a specific company," says Lochner. "Thieves are

looking for the target that will reap the greatest reward for the least amount of risk."

Lochner says these are not brute-force, spur-of-the-moment crimes. Rather, they are meticulously planned, with months of research and intelligence. Often they are helped from "the inside". At the time of writing, two police officers have just been arrested, accused of being part of a criminal gang which targeted cash transporters in Mpumalanga.

SBV Protection Services, a company that offers cash delivery services, is currently offering a R1-million reward for information, following a heist in Mpumalanga in which three security guards were shot and wounded.

Strategies that helped to reduce the number of cash-in-transit robberies over the last decade included reducing the amount of money carried per van, and better training for staff. But the industry is at risk of going backwards, argues joint CEO of Cash Connect Management Solutions Richard Phillips, as a result of downward pressure on pricing. Speaking at an event on the subject, Phillips said firms were able to charge only half what they could 15 years ago in straight rand value, affecting the service that can

be delivered. This has led some to argue that prices could be regulated, in order to maintain standards.

Lochner says there are preventive measures that could reduce these types of crimes. Standardised vetting processes for employees would be a start: ensure that every employee is put through vetting processes that leave no stone unturned.

There is also a role for visible policing on the routes driven by vans.

One of the biggest factors in the growth of this type of crime, however, is that it is rarely prosecuted properly. Lochner calls for thorough investigations by a team of detectives in order to cover all bases.

"There are so many aspects of a cash-in-transit heist that need to be considered, that it is easy for important information and intelligence to slip through the cracks. Research has shown that for 21 accused convicted for cash-in-transit heists, there are 138 co-accused that go free," says Lochner, "and that is why it is important to work in teams. Criminal intelligence is not shared at any point in the criminal process, as the accused are advised by their lawyers not to volunteer information. The judicial system therefore tends to work in favour of the accused." ■

## MOST DANGEROUS?

DR HENNIE LOCHNER RECKONS THAT CASH-IN-TRANSIT CRIMINALS ARE AMONG SOUTH AFRICA'S MOST DANGEROUS. WHEN ASKED WHAT HE FOUND MOST SURPRISING IN HIS RESEARCH OF THESE CRIMES, HE SAID: "IT'S THE VIOLENCE - NOT ONLY IN THE CRIMES, BUT AMONG THEMSELVES. THEY BECOME LIKE A CRIMINAL FAMILY. THEY SHOW ABSOLUTELY NO MERCY TO THEIR VICTIMS EITHER. THERE ARE ALWAYS CASUALTIES."