



AFTERMATH: Spent ammunition lies scattered in the road at the scene of a recent cash-in-transit robbery. Gangsters opened fire on the armoured vehicle as well as on motorists before fleeing the scene with an undisclosed amount of money.

PICTURE: LIANNE BUTLER

Steady increase in cash heists, statistics reveal

Specialised institutions, partnerships with the SAPS urged to stop the scourge

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THERE'S no secret that cash-in-transit (CIT) crimes in the country have increased, with more than R15 million seized countrywide in CIT heists between January and April this year alone.

This is according to figures that have been released by the South African Banking Risk Information Centre (Sabric).

On Wednesday morning, an attempted cash-in-transit heist went terribly wrong after four men involved in shootout with security guards made a quick getaway with no money in Broadway, Witbank.

Mpumalanga police spokesperson Brigadier Leonard Hlathi said four thugs are believed to have approached a filling station in Witbank just after 7am.

Three of the men were driving in a silver Volkswagen Polo and another in a silver Audi A4, and they opened fire on a G4S armoured vehicle.

"The suspects attempted to rob the G4S cash-in-transit occupants, but were met with gunfire, and no money was taken.

"A 38-year-old man and his crew were driving a G4S vehicle during the incident, and the complainant fired some shots and it is believed that one suspect was shot on the leg and other suspects man-

aged to take him into their car and flee the scene," said Hlathi.

No money was taken, according to Hlathi.

Sabric chief executive Kalayani Pillay revealed that the organisation had recorded 229 CIT incidents nationally this year.

"An increase of 49% is evident when comparing this year to the same period last year," said Pillay.

"Although a slight increase in cash loss has been recorded so far in 2017 compared to the same period in 2016, there is much concern at the number of injuries and loss of life of CIT staff, including the damage caused to CIT vehicles in incidents where criminals use explosives during these attacks," said Pillay.

According to Pillay, the tactics used in CIT crime are typical of violent organised criminal syndicates, which in some cases are groups of between 10 and 20 individuals armed with automatic rifles and who use commercial explosives in their attempts to access the vaults on the vehicles.

"We would like to see all these criminals put behind bars, and in this regard Sabric and the CIT industry are working closely with the SAPS to address this scourge," Pillay

added.

The 2015/2016 national crime statistics show a 15% increase in CIT robberies, with peak periods generally occurring in April and December.

An expert in the cash management industry, and chief executive of Cash Connect Management Solutions, Richard Phillips, told The Star that it was no secret that cash crimes such as CIT had increased in recent times.

"With the cash in circulation figure at around R130 billion, retail businesses will remain a priority target for professional crime syndicates.

We believe that retailers in South Africa deserve to trade in a safe and secure business environment.

"In view of the current increase in armoured vehicle heists, cross-pavement attacks and armed robberies against retailers, we urge business owners to be extra vigilant.

"Cash crimes in the country are a problem," Phillips pointed out.

He said that over the past two years, there had been a steady increase in the number of cash crimes, and that this year "it has gone nuts".

"From a personal perspective, we have taken the eye off the ball.

"What we don't have is a special unit in the police looking at cash crimes.

"We are back in a situation where we were at the turn of the century.

"My cry here is that there needs to be a prioritisation of cash crimes," added Phillips.

According to Hlathi, the SAPS was unable to provide statistics around the number of arrests made in connection with CIT crimes, but he was adamant that the police were working hard to nab these criminals.

"We can't give stats, but what I can say is that we do experience some problems regarding cash-in-transit heists.

"Even though we have made breakthroughs with some cases, we are still not happy. We have got groups of these people who are responsible for the CITs," said Hlathi.

Hlathi confirmed that over the last two months, there had been two CIT heists in the Lowveld area of Mpumalanga.

In one incident, The Lowvelder (an Mpumalanga news agency) reported that about 10 gangsters driving in four vehicles opened fire on a security vehicle on the N4 near Mbombela in late July.

The robbers forced the guards out of the vehicle and used explosives to open the van, before fleeing with an undisclosed amount of cash.

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