

What happens after a housebreaking?

Nobody likes the feeling of discovering that their home has been broken into. It's an invasion of privacy, a loss of valuable and often sentimental goods.

From a policing perspective, housebreaking is always a priority crime. This crime is tackled at various levels, firstly prevention by having visible patrols in your area, secondly by responding to suspicious movements on or around properties, responding when a housebreaking has taken place in the hopes of catching someone in the act and finally through investigation after the fact.

When a home has been broken into the first thing that needs to be established is which crime has been committed. In South Africa, the legal definition of Housebreaking relies on the following events taking place:

- 1. Entry to the property must be forced and there must be visible evidence of this*
- 2. Goods must have been removed from the property and these must be specified in writing*
- 3. No permission must have been given for the entry or removal*

If these three elements aren't present, then it will not be classified as a housebreaking.

If your case has been registered as a housebreaking, the following information may be of assistance to you in understanding the process and procedures:

Once your case has been reported, you will be given a case number (For example 101/08/2007 Milnerton) this is used as a reference to your specific case. Your case will be assigned for immediate review by the on- duty detective. He may want to come and inspect the scene of the housebreaking and will call you on the telephone number you have supplied. He will arrange someone from fingerprints to visit you as quickly as possible, however this may take up to 48 hours. It is important that you don't touch anything that could have been handled by the suspect(s) before the fingerprint officer has been to inspect the scene. If in doubt, please ask the detective on duty what you can and cannot handle while waiting.

Your case will be assigned to an investigating officer after the initial on-scene investigation. If there are any leads, he will follow them up, so descriptions of suspicious persons seen around the property at the time of the housebreaking

are vital - it's always a good idea to ask neighbors if they saw anything out of the ordinary or heard anything. If no immediate leads are available for investigation, your stolen property will be listed so that when regular checks are conducted on pawn brokers and raids on drug houses take place, stolen property can be identified.

PLEASE do your best to make your property identifiable by serial numbers or ultraviolet pen markings if not engraving. There is nothing more frustrating to a policeman than catching a suspect with property he thinks has been stolen and not being able to trace the real owner. Items like Hi Fi's, laptops and televisions should always be marked, keep a record of the IMEI number of cellphones in your home - it's this information that is most likely to lead to the arrest of the person who broke into your home, without it we may not be able to solve the crime.

Fingerprints that are lifted from the scene of the crime are checked against suspects if there are any. In the absence of a suspect to match prints against, the prints are loaded to portable fingerprint terminals (known as Morpho Touch units). These units are routinely used when a suspect is detained and on random stop and search operations.

Often the person who broke into your home is caught a while later for another offence, having the fingerprints from your home on the Morpho Touch means that the suspect can then be linked to your housebreaking case and detained as a suspect.

Once a suspect is arrested, the detective will take a statement from him, investigate all aspects of the crime and forward the case to the State Prosecutor. The State Prosecutor will weigh up the evidence and chances of a successful conviction and will make a decision whether or not to continue with a prosecution of the suspect or call on the detective to get additional information.

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