



HPCSA – COMPUTER BURGLARS STRIKE AGAIN

Burglars stole scores of computers from the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) headquarters in Sunnyside in what police believe may be 'an inside job' that began as Pretoria's rugby-mad inhabitants joined the nation to watch the rugby world cup final kick-off.

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This time it was 'well organised', with an estimated 14 night-time thieves systematically breaking open offices and locks, allegedly guided by someone giving instructions on a cell phone.

HPCSA spokesperson Greer van Zyl said a security guard was overpowered by 3 men, 2 of whom were armed, as he emerged from a lift in the building at 21h03 on 20 October 2007 – 3 minutes after the rugby world cup final kick-off.

One of the burglars reportedly wore a Magnum Security company uniform.

The guard was handcuffed and blindfolded before being ordered to lie on his stomach in one of the ground-floor committee rooms near the reception area. His attackers demanded the keys for the registration office where computers bearing the registration details of health care professionals are housed.

Investigating officer, Inspector Phineas Kgakwa, said that the guard overheard the cell phone conversations while 2 burglars stood guard over him. 'They were busy asking directions of where to find what, so it might be an inside job. They were saying OK, OK, where? OK ...,' he quoted the guard as telling him.

Asked about the guard's estimate of 14 burglars, he said this was 'most likely as 3 people cannot take all those boxes in such a short time'.

The computer equipment is believed by Kgakwa to have been loaded into a vehicle parked in the building's basement parking lot.

Witness 'intimidated'

Kgakwa said the security guard had subsequently 'been getting some intimidation at work, saying he's involved in these things. I told him that if anyone had information they must come to me.' The HPCSA said it was unaware of this.

On 29 May 2006 an unknown number of thieves broke a panel of glass on the ground-floor level to gain access to the building, stealing 8 computer central processing units (CPUs).

Van Zyl said that on the rugby world cup final night the thieves made off with 67 CPUs, 27 flat screen monitors, 3 laptops, a microwave oven, a kettle and computer accessories. The detective said access was gained by forcing a ground-floor door.

Asked how the burglary had affected operations, Van Zyl said staff were 'still able to register people but we were back up and running at full capacity within 3 days'.

She joked that if it was an inside job, any suspects would have been extremely nervous because in the week following the break-in a Scorpions detective had addressed staff on white-collar fraud during a previously arranged address.

Detective 'unaware' of previous burglary

Inspector Kgakwa said he was unaware of the May 2006 computer burglary at the HPCSA but agreed that knowledge about this could prove helpful in solving the case.

He was awaiting results from the criminal records centre after several fingerprints were successfully lifted in the latest break-in, but this could take '6 months if we're lucky, or more than a year'.

Sunnyside detectives were 'now getting burglary results of fingerprints for 2001'.

Kgakwa had no leads at the time of the *Izindaba* interview (19 November 2007).

'They were busy asking directions of where to find what, so it might be an inside job. They were saying OK, OK, where? OK ...,' he quoted the guard as telling him.

He speculated that the thieves 'seemed to know' that there was no camera surveillance system.

HPCSA spokesperson, Tendai Dhliwayo, later confirmed to *Izindaba* that they were aware of the possibility of it being an 'inside job', and were conducting their own internal probe with the security company.

The computers contained health care practitioners' biographical and qualifications data. He could not see 'the utility of this information to the criminals', as its possession was not capable of affording them any ground for possible abuse.

More security staff would be hired while cameras with off-site surveillance and access control would be installed and night patrols by an external, independent security company would 'continue in the meantime'.

Chris Bateman