

CRIME AND VANDALISM SURVEY

Chamber urgently calls Government to act on these results

Embargo 12:00pm Wednesday 12 April 2017

Over the last week, the Chamber of Commerce NT conducted an on-line survey with our NT business community, asking if they had been affected by the current crime and vandalism wave, and to describe the impacts it has had on their businesses.

“In a resounding response almost 400 local business owners took time out of their busy schedules to respond – confirming this is a serious issue for business that demands urgent action by the Territory Government including stronger resourcing in this upcoming Budget” said A/g CEO of the Chamber, Brian O’Gallagher.

Over 70% of respondents claim they have been a victim of crime and vandalism within the last 12 months – mostly break-ins, attempted break ins, damage to property and stolen goods. This confirms that the issue is real and not a so-called media beat up.

In terms of financial impact, respondents stated they were impacted with damages and loss of earnings ranging from around \$1000 to greater than \$150,000. Significant impacts also related to personal stress, businesses having to close to make the necessary repairs and a loss of business confidence.

Other impacts personally raised by some businesses included ‘the impact on tourism – with guests feeling unsafe’, ‘nervous staff members both in the workplace and when leaving work at night’ and ‘the boarding up of windows and doors to deter criminals lessening the appearance of many shop fronts’.

The majority of businesses report these crimes to the Police but the success in finding or prosecuting offenders seems limited. More than 85% of participants said they reported the crime, with only 20% stating that they knew the offenders were found or prosecuted.

Of great concern is that many businesses don’t see the any value in claiming insurance - with almost 65% of respondents indicating they don’t lodge a claim because of the worry of increased insurance premiums or that their excess is so high it is not worth making a claim.

Crime & Vandalism is clearly a Territory wide issue for local businesses - with responses coming from across the Territory, and naming almost all suburbs in Darwin, Palmerston, the Rural Area, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy.

Mr O’Gallagher said “the Chamber of Commerce NT will share these results directly with the Chief Minister and Minister for Business, the Hon. Michael Gunner and his Ministerial and Parliamentary colleagues. We will also share them with the Police Commissioner and other relevant Agency CEOs.”

At the suggestion of our local businesses – “ We now urge the NT Government to take some fast action on this issue including the immediate provision of stronger police resources and additional targeted education & diversionary programs in this year’s Territory Budget.

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Many businesses want to see a genuine commitment to enforcing current laws and penalties to help reduce crime & vandalism. There is a strong perception that the victims of crime are being ignored by the judicial system – and that repeat offenders suffer little consequences.

‘Although we understand it is not a quick fix, something must be done urgently to lessen the impact of crime and vandalism on business. It is damaging to businesses who are already trying to succeed in a tough climate as well as to the reputation of the Northern Territory – a place that the Government is publically trying to promote to Australia and overseas as a ‘great place to do business’.

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Government Action – Sample of Respondent’s Views:

- “Whilst we have not been impacted personally we do know those who are particularly those in the main street with smashed windows. My view is that the person that does the crime should be made to work in that business to pay the debt that way they also perhaps get an understanding of the business - just a thought.”
- “NT Police with Government are still reactive and not proactive. If they get dedicated Youth Police specially trained to interview children and are proactive we would see a lot of at risk children identified early and with other Government agencies hopefully put on the right track. This squad of youth police need to be active 24/7 as I see groups of 12 to 30 youths coming into the CBD between midnight and 7am almost on a daily basis.”
- “Law enforcement and the justice system seem unable to treat the problem. We have a major breakdown of the social fabric which requires radical change. Instead of detention or prison to treat youth crime, federal and state governments should consider enforced public service such as national service. Being sentenced to education and training over multiple years will break the cycle. These kids want security, discipline and a future. The reduced burden on the criminal justice system and savings derived from the impact on the economy, business and private sector alone will pay off the investment.”
- “If the offender is a minor, the parents should be partly responsible for their kid’s actions. No 14 or 15 year old should be away from their home after 10pm, unless it is at an organised event. Parents should be responsible for the child and their actions if their whereabouts are not known.”
- “Ensure that families are part of the process. Parents need to be held accountable for their own and their children’s actions. If the children cannot be controlled by the parents then the government should implement a coaching program to teach them how to look after kids.”
- “Make those responsible pay back cost of damage. If underage, the parents should be responsible for the payment.”
- “Boot Camps for repeat offenders where they learn social, economic and job skills so that they become employable.”
- “Bring back the ID check for purchasing alcohol across the whole of the Territory. This will stop all the banned drinkers hanging around Darwin to buy alcohol.”
- “Consider victim/perpetrator mediation and direct community service work for victims.”
- “Offenders to do community work and clean up jobs at the places they did damages to...should apply to all offenders regardless of age.”
- “Increased security monitoring - use of cameras, more on public streets and shops. Rates and taxes are paid to feel safe.”
- “Offenders should be put into 6 months detention with no contact with family.”

ATTACHMENT 2

Impacts of Crime – Sample of Respondent’s Views:

- “We run our business from home and now sleep with keys under my pillow and a baseball bat within reach.”
- “We have concern for the well being of our livestock and in fact, the safety of the offenders as well!”
- “We get drunken people walking past, abusing us, drinking outside our fence. Recently, one was run over while flagging down a taxi.”
- “There was a truck driver who was assaulted when discovering a break in...”
- It has a huge impact on our productivity – we waste time to clean up mess which includes poo, wee, rotten food, needle and tablets. We have concerns about the health impact this has regarding airborne bacteria.”
- Every morning as I arrive to work I half expect to find my office has been broken into. I can only imagine what repeat victims must go through. It defies belief that a business like the Deck Bar, which can be only a few hundred metres from the nearest cop shop is regularly broken into.”
- “We are losing the desire to maintain the premises as it feels like a losing battle.”
- “There is a lot of stress to my staff members while working night shifts.”
- “We have had a loss of customers, continuing frustration with the legal system, and a diminishing belief in community safety.”
- “It really impacts staff moral. They have a fear of working back and walking to their cars.”
- “You just get sick of it. Personally we installed Crim Safe Mesh on windows and all entrances/exits; looks poor however we have had no break-ins in the several years since installation.”
- “We do not want to re-invest in the business as heavily due to the risk of vandalism ruining new assets.”
- “Our windows are now boarded up. We got sick of replacing glass.”
- “I am a regular visitor to Darwin and the town centre has deteriorated over the past 3 years so much so that I do not recommend Darwin to people anymore.”