

# PERFORMANCE AUDIT IN BRIEF

## Dealing with household burglaries NSW Police Force

### About the audit

Household burglary is an invasive crime that concerns many citizens.

In 2003, the NSW Police Force implemented the Fundamental Response to Crime (FRC) which outlined new strategies for dealing with break and enters.

In the last five years, household burglaries fell by over 30 per cent. Recorded rates of burglary are now lower than they were 10 years ago.

Despite these changes, household burglary is still the fourth most common crime affecting citizens, and citizens perceive that break and enter continues to be a problem in their local area.

We wanted to find out how well the NSW Police Force:

- responds to reports of household burglary
- investigates household burglaries
- reduces household burglaries.

### Audit opinion

The NSW Police Force has done well to maintain a downward trend in household burglaries in NSW since 2001. Police recognise the impact this crime has on the community's perception of security and safety. Success has come from a continued focus on prevention and enforcement.

However, there are other factors which have influenced this result. These include a rise in the rate and length of imprisonment, the heroin drought in 2001, increases in the number of heroin users entering treatment, low levels of unemployment, and increases in average weekly earnings of young males.

Amongst these factors, it is difficult to judge the extent of the impact police have had on this result. Nevertheless, the police's view is that the results should have been better.

Last year, break and enters dropped by around 2,500. However, each command had set a target that would have resulted in an overall decrease of around 8,000 break and enters.

Police have strategies in place to reduce household burglary. However, moving forward, we identified opportunities for police to improve their approach to both prevention and detection.

The fact remains that crime rates vary across NSW. Although 60 per cent of all household burglaries occur in Sydney, the risk of being a victim of a household burglary is greater in disadvantaged communities, whether these are located in metropolitan or rural areas. There is also a greater risk of burglary for those previously burgled.

Yet the police response to household burglary is determined by local protocols and the availability of resources, not the victims' location.

Today, police rely heavily on forensic evidence to solve these crimes. Yet there is no guarantee that even where evidence is available at the scene, a forensic officer will be available to collect it, or that the response is timely. This is necessary to prevent degradation or contamination of the evidence and minimise inconvenience to the victim.

Intelligence also plays a major role in helping prevent or solve these crimes. Yet police do not record specific data on household burglaries separately from commercial break and enters, although offenders may have different modus operandi and properties exhibit different risks.

In 2005-06, over 90 per cent of break and enters remained unsolved. We recognise that solving these crimes is a difficult task. We consider prevention strategies focussed on high risk neighbourhoods and high risk offenders may have the greatest impact on crime rates in the long term.



