

# Alarming rise in domestic theft

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THE NUMBER of cases of domestic theft has risen by 70 percent, according to a private investigations company.

But employers should be wary of using lie detector tests as they are not legally binding.

During the first half of 2013, said Justicia investigations company, they handled 70 percent more cases of theft by a domestic worker or other employee in the home than they did for the first half of 2012. However, simply because they have seen a rise in their work does not necessarily mean that this type of crime is on the increase in general.

"As with most crimes in this country, there are no available statistics to indicate how serious the situation is," Justicia said.

The company's operational director, Alan Carey, said people should still know how to deal with the situation should it arise. "A domestic crime is painful and stressful because it has happened so close to home. Small things lead to bigger crimes and, once a trust relationship has been violated, it is gone," Carey said.

He said that conventional labour laws must be adhered to, with a disciplinary hearing called and documented if there is suspicion of any wrongdoing.

If it is proved that the employee committed the crime, he or she should sign an admission of guilt before being dismissed.

But a rigorous selection process could prevent this headache in the first place.

"Rather than simply going by a referral from a friend or family member, you need to interview applicants, find out where they have worked before and then contact those people," Carey said.

He also suggested a pre-employment polygraph test, also known as a lie detector test, which measures involuntary body reaction to see if a person is being deceitful.

However, before subjecting a potential or current employee to such a test, it should be known that polygraph tests are not accepted in court and though they are legal to perform in South Africa, both parties need to give signed, written consent.