

## The prickly problem of domestic worker theft

DOMESTIC theft is believed to be on the rise. During the first half of this year, Justicia private investigations company said, it had handled 70 percent more cases of theft by a domestic worker or other employee in the home than for the same period last year.

But simply because the company has seen an increase in their work – and the recent on-air flurry of anecdotal examples – may not necessarily equate to this type of crime being on the increase in general.

Proving theft, especially if small items disappear over a period of time, can be difficult and false accusations can land the employer in trouble with the employee.

“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 the important thing was for householders to be vigilant and to 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, and a trust relationship is violated,” Carey said.

Conventional labour laws must be adhered to, he said, with a disciplinary hearing called and documented if there is suspicion of any wrongdoing by a domestic worker.

If it is proved the employee did commit a crime such as stealing an employer's belongings, he or she should sign an admission of guilt before being dismissed. A rigorous selection process could prevent this – interview applicants and contact those people where they have worked for a reference. – Brendan Roane