

ESTABLISHED FOR NELSON REGION SINCE 1841
The Nelson Mail

BNZ installs DNA anti-crime system

Stuff.co.nz Last updated 09:34 02/09/2009

BNZ is installing equipment in its banks which will spray fleeing robbers with a micro-mist of traceable DNA.

Devices installed around the doorways of branches will coat criminals with invisible droplets of synthetic molecules as they make their getaway.

The DNA would be unique to each bank branch, allowing police to definitively say an offender could not have picked up the DNA from any where else in the world or at any time than the robbery, said BNZ security strategy manager Owen Loeffellechner.

The DNA would be retrievable just like human DNA by the ESR and admissable in court, he said.

It showed up blue under UV light and remained on skin for up to two weeks, clothing for six months even when washed, and was claimed to mark products indefinitely.

A sample the size of a pinhead was all that was required.

"It's a fantastic solution, hence why we've embraced it," said Mr Loeffellechner.

The average number of robberies across all bank chains from 2000 to 2006 was in the low 20s a year. But from 2007 that had spiked to 63 a year, Mr Loeffellechner said.

"That spike has now become a trend. And in 2009 the figures are already running worse than last year," he said.

"People are blaming the recession, but I don't buy into that given that the spike started in 2007."

The BNZ had outfitted six branches in Manukau with the Hydra Spray SelectaDNA devices which officially went into service this week.

It would be rolled out to all 184 branches nationwide over the next few months. The bank would not reveal the cost but it was likely to be near \$1 million.

The DNA solution, called SelectaDNA, was invented in 2004 and manufactured by UK based Selectamark Security Systems.

David Morrissey, a director of the local distributor SelectaDNA (NZ) Ltd said it had been offered to all New Zealand banks and would be available to any company.

The BNZ was introduced to the product through the New Zealand Police who were instrumental in bringing it here.

Counties Manukau Inspector Jason Hewitt said the Manukau police district commander Superintendent Mike Bush had heard about such technology and "we went looking for someone who could provide that crime fighting tool in New Zealand because it has had such an outstanding effect overseas."

The Counties Manukau police district had more than 8,500 burglaries last year and more than 11,500 thefts.

Manukau police this week began handing out bottles of the synthetic DNA to 1000 householders in Randwick Park in a trial of its effectiveness. The bottled solution could be painted onto property to identify it.

Each bottle had a unique DNA code recorded in a database.

Police had averaged the current number of burglaries in the suburb and planned a six month trial monitoring whether the DNA would deter burglaries, Mr Hewitt said.

He could not release the current burglary statistics as it breached police guidelines to reveal figures at a suburb level. The trial required special permission from the police national statistics office.

However he said Randwick Park was chosen because it had a high number of repeat burglaries.

He said police recognised backing SelectaDNA was a "delicate" situation - police were prohibited from officially endorsing a product, but were endorsing the "concept."

"It is similar to police endorsing burglar alarms, but we don't endorse Joe's Alarms."

However, SelectaDNA is the only product of its type on the market in New Zealand.

Mr Morrissey said police had backed similar trials in the UK and he hoped to use the eventual results for marketing.

He would sell bottles of the DNA solution, which could be painted on property, for \$100 each. He estimated that gave enough solution to mark 100 items.

His company would maintain the DNA code database but police would have direct computer access to it.

His company had also supplied all frontline Manukau police with UV torches and he would extend that to all police in the country.

Superintendent Mike Bush, District Commander for Counties Manukau Police said police were backing the trial because: "The NZ police supports all initiatives, that actively prevent crime. We are all aware burglary is a crime that affects a huge number of New Zealanders every year. It's very destructive for individuals and has an impact on the community."