



Dogs help keep the burglars at bay

PET dogs, whatever their size and whatever their breed, are a key deterrent to burglars, according to the latest research from the Petcare Information and Advisory Service.

PIAS spokesperson Susie Willis said statistics showed that someone in Australia is burgled every few minutes, and the figures would be a lot worse were it not for the family dog.

She said the vast majority of dog owners reported that having a dog around the house was a big deterrent to burglars, and they put this down to a dog's ability to monitor and alert neighbours if an intruder enters the property.

And it seems that leading insurers agree with these findings. Paul Northey, General Manager of RACV Insurance, said thieves were opportunistic, and generally were on the lookout for 'soft targets,' such as homes where they can get in and out quickly without being seen or heard.

"Anything that makes this more difficult, whether it be a monitored alarm, well secured doors and windows, or a dog that will bark when it sees anything unusual is a good thing," he said.

Ms Willis said research from the University of Western Australia showed that dog ownership contributed to a broader feeling of safety within the community.

"The perception of safety is one of the key measures of community well-being, and it is clear from the UWA research that the presence of dogs in a community contributes to feelings of safety," she said.

"Dr Lisa Wood from the School of Population Health at the University of Western Australia also found that people out walking dogs increased social interaction within the community, and made the community as a whole feel safer.

"This isn't about guard dogs and fences. It is about people recognising a neighbour who they see out walking their dog, or people stopping to chat to a dog owner. It is also about the feeling of personal safety that dog owners have, with the research showing that 83 percent of dog owners say they feel safer in their homes because they own a dog.

"Dogs may well be an effective deterrent to burglars, but it is clear that they also bring a range of benefits to their owners and the broader community."

It is estimated that 63 percent of Australian households have some type of pet, with 53 percent of households owning a dog or a cat.

Over many years, Australian and international research has shown that owning pets can also help improve a person's mental and physical health, reduce the effects of stress, help children learn about responsibility, facilitate social interaction between people and build a sense of community. The Petcare Information and Advisory Service is online at www.petnet.net.

