

Criminals target pokies

Paula Doneman
CRIME EDITOR

THIEVES are targeting poker machines with dozens of smash-and-grab robberies at licensed premises across the state in recent weeks.

The after-hours thefts usually involve breaking into an office to obtain the keys that open the poker machines, which can sometimes carry hundreds of dollars in notes and coins if they haven't been emptied at the end of the night.

Thieves cleaned out poker machines at three licensed venues on the Gold Coast last Monday night. Similar raids have occurred in Brisbane, on the Sunshine Coast and in several regional centres.

On October 15, thieves broke open four poker machines at the Crushers Football Club at The Grange in Brisbane's inner north.

The spate of thefts has prompted licensed clubs to educate operators about tougher security and make a call for wider police investigation.

The robberies are proving lucrative.

At least \$10,000 was stolen from 15 poker machines at the Caloundra Golf Club during one of the attacks, sources said.

And the raids could be linked.

Gold Coast police suspect break-ins at the Norfolk Tavern at Norfolk Pines and the Shearer's Arms Hotel at Ormeau may have been committed by the same thieves.

Detective Acting Chief Superintendent Peter Crawford of the State Crime Operations Command confirmed there had been a series of raids on poker machine premises and investigations by the Property Crime Unit were under way.

The Clubs Queensland organisation, which represents more than 1000 licensed clubs in the state, said the theft from poker machines had "definitely become a problem" during the past 12 months.

Chief executive Doug Flockhardt said clubs needed to ensure they had appropriate security.

"That can include time delay safes, CCTV cameras and to ensure they have proper protocols such as two staff working together and emergency buttons that can be pushed to alert police," Mr Flockhardt said.

Clubs Queensland, in anticipation of an increase in robberies, had organised risk-management training.

"It's a one-day course of risk management for all crimes including pokies," he said.