

Shopping centres gear up for visitors

The South African Council of Shopping Centres (SACSC), representing over 1500 property companies and retailers across the country, anticipates that during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, an estimated 400 000 visitors to South Africa will watch one match every three to four days on average. When not at a stadium they will frequent the fan park zones, take tours or visit shopping centres. Furthermore, with all schools and universities closed for the duration of the world cup, many malls will see a surge in unaccompanied youngsters and teenagers, necessitating additional security.

The Council's president, Sisa Ngebulana, reports that the council is confident that local shopping centres are ready to welcome the world while ensuring that regular consumers are able to enjoy a relatively hassle-free shopping experience.

Greater potential for fraud, criminal activity

SACSC will provide an operations and information hub at a dedicated Shopping Centre Security Initiative Office. "Working closely with the South African Police Services and a number of organising committees affiliated to the World Cup, SACSC has, since December 2009, established a strong network of contacts and partnerships to support the effort," notes Selma Black, project manager of the initiative.

With increased shopper numbers and other factors arising from this event, such as road closures, the need for more stock and staff, there is a potential for increase in fraud and a possible increase in other criminal activity. Black explains that it has had to assess carefully how best to prepare its members. SACSC has spearheaded a carefully planned approach, which proactively takes into account the many changes and challenges that come with an event of this magnitude.

Black says, "Meeting the challenge of providing excellent and appropriate security, yet doing this in such a way that shoppers still feel welcome and comfortable is the ultimate goal. We are confident that our initiative will support shopping centres and retailers to operate maximally to the benefit, convenience and safety of the millions of shoppers they will be servicing."

Fraud could increase

For the SACSC, security preparations and precautions for the World Cup goes beyond guards, patrols and CCTV and shopper security, it also extends to the protection of retailers against fraudsters looking to take advantage of the flurry of bustling trade.

"As shopper numbers increase, so does the likelihood of fraudulent activity, including credit card, travellers cheque and identity fraud," explains Black. "These types of fraud can be prevented if more retailers have effective procedures in place, and if they know what to look for and what steps to take if a transaction is suspicious. Here, the council provides clear

guidelines on identifying counterfeit credit cards and steps to verify identity."

In addition, as road closures limit routes in and out of major centres and as shopper numbers peak, Black explains that some changes in cash management practices will also become necessary.

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