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Operation Barrel, which is being spearheaded by specialist Proactive CID Units and Road Policing Teams from Midlothian, East Lothian, Edinburgh and Fife, will focus on key individuals who are targeting properties throughout the East of Scotland.

This is a proactive operation coordinated across a number of police divisions. It will target individuals who are breaking into houses during late evening or early mornings with the intent on stealing the owner's vehicles.

The same groups are then using the stolen vehicles to target commercial premises. It is believed that the majority of these individuals responsible for committing these crimes are young men from the Edinburgh area.

The number of housebreakings has escalated in the last week and police are increasingly concerned that events may take an alarming turn. The volume of incidents has prompted police to take action, with nearly fifty houses and business premises broken into in the last week.

Officers are advising home and business owners to take steps to protect their property and vehicles, such as ensuring doors and windows are locked and that your vehicle keys are hidden.

Business owners are also advised to ensure intruder alarms are activated and to that cash is locked away and kept out of

sight.

Police Scotland is also working closely with the Crown Office and Prosecution Service to ensure that those arrested are dealt with robustly to prevent them from committing further crimes.

Detective Superintendent Pat Campbell said: "The recent rise in these crimes is extremely worrying. If this trend continues, it will be a matter of time before a member of the public is injured or killed."

"It is believed that the majority of these individuals responsible for committing these crimes are young men who have a complete disregard for their actions and to the potential serious consequences of driving stolen vehicles at speed.

"We will use everything we have at our disposal to target the individuals involved in committing these crimes which is having a huge impact on victims, their families and the entire community.

"I would ask anyone who can assist police with their ongoing enquiries is asked to call 101 or alternatively you can make contact anonymously through the charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111."
