

Be proactive - practical tips...

By **TIMES GUEST** columnist **PHIL THOMPSON**

LET'S look at some practical safety strategies that can be used immediately to help you prevent or prepare for an attack, should it ever occur.

There are hundreds of tips and strategies and most of them are common sense. It's just that most people don't think of them until it's too late. The few I write about here will hopefully also get you thinking about what else you can proactively adjust, adopt or stop doing, to ensure you're best prepared.

One of the most useful questions you can ask yourself is: If I were an attacker, where would I attack myself?

We all have routines and patterns in our lives. Often these routines become so automatic that we don't take the time to consider potential opportunities that we may be creating for an attacker.

Think about the general routine of your day. Then think 'where are the weaknesses?' Think about where you park your car. Is it well lit or not? If someone wants to attack you there, where would you be most vulnerable? Do you check the backseat for people hiding before you get in? Do you lock your doors when you drive?

This is not paranoia, anymore than putting on a seatbelt. It's proactive. When stopped at traffic lights do you leave enough room between your car and the vehicle in front to see its rear tyres?

This ensures that should you encounter road rage or a car jacking you're more likely to be able to manoeuvre away.

Where do you park when getting to work or any other destination? Is it a secluded area, underground

car park, alleyway? If so, have you thought about potential danger spots and thought out an escape plan should something happen?

Doing this allows your brain to access pre-thought-out 'files' if things turn bad. If you haven't previously thought things through, and something happens, you may panic and freeze because the files are not there.

If you walk, do you wear appropriate footwear in case you have to run? Do you stick to populated areas or do you take shortcuts through potentially dangerous parks/alleyways/fields?

Have you thought about what items you carry on a day-to-day basis that could be used as an improvised weapon if you had to? How would you use your keys, pen, bag, cell phone, water bottle etc, against someone to allow your escape?

Getting to your office do you take stairs or an elevator? Have you thought how you would handle a potential threat in these environments?

If you have to stay late or leave after dark, maybe alone, have you thought about the safest way of doing this and potential threats?

Home security is vital. You don't need to live in Fort Knox, but at least have the basics sorted.

Do you check all doors and windows are locked before bed? Do you not hide keys under mats/pot plants (people still do it!)? Do you ask for ID for anyone who comes to the door?

If you have an alarm do you use it effectively? Do you have functioning bulbs in all entrances?

Do you have sensor lights at the front and back of your home? Do



you know which neighbours can be trusted in an emergency?

There's a full range of home safety tips on our Protect website. Take two minutes to run a home safety check.

These are just workday examples. Do the same for your weekends, nights out, hobby events and everything else you do. If you don't work, apply it to your own daily routine.

It may sound like a lot of work, but once you really think about it and start to proactively do little things to keep yourself and your loved ones safer, it all starts to become automatic.

It's worth doing. So many times we hear victims of violent crime say to us: 'If only I'd thought about the danger beforehand, it was so obvious.'

Don't wish you'd thought about it after it's too late. Get proactive and start now.

■ **Phil Thompson from Protect - Reality Based Self Defence (www.protectselfdefence.co.nz) is a guest columnist for Times writing on self defence issues.**