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A NEW PENALTY ON WEALTH?

BY RUSS ALAN PRINCE & HANNAH SHAW GROVE

Violent reprisals on the affluent are the product of mounting financial distress. Here's how to avoid any security breaches.

The economic crisis is spawning a laundry list of problems, and one of the gravest is an increase in financial-oriented crime. The wealthy have always been targets; for years, their assets and property have drawn the attention of predators and con artists.

MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

But a recent rash of crimes has caught many victims by surprise. "A lot of anger is being directed at the rich right now," says Mitch Gitter, president of New York-based private security firm **Defender Security Services**. "In many ways, they've become the scapegoats for the global financial meltdown." In some cases the victim may be viewed as a catalyst or contributor to the grim climate. In others, it may simply be a desperate response to visible (or perceived) wealth.

More formal protests against the wealthy are occurring too. A German group identified as BMW, roughly translated as the Movement for Military

Resistance, relies on terrorist tactics to communicate its displeasure with the upper classes—firebombing unoccupied high-end automobiles is one favored method. According to **Joseph Petro**, managing director for **Citigroup Security and Investigative Services**, "It's not uncommon for one faction to attack whoever it deems to be the source of hardship or a barrier to advancement." Certainly, the widespread economic gains from the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s helped to mask some of the disparities between certain socio-economic groups, but one can't help but notice the similarities between such visible and destructive measures and the mood of, say, pre-revolutionary Russia.

Understandably, the level of concern is growing. "Most of our clients are already highly defensive when it comes to the welfare of their inner circle and the safety of their belongings and personal information," says **Richard J. Flynn**, a principal of **Rothstein Kass**. "But we're definitely seeing an uptick in the demand for more proactive and decisive security."

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