

Burglaries rise fast as economy goes slow

Ministers fear start of a recession crime wave

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Burglaries, robberies and muggings are on the rise for the first time in years as fears grow among ministers that the economic downturn is driving up crime.

Figures from Britain's biggest police force provide the first indication that years of falling crime are coming to an end. The Metropolitan Police has reported big increases in robbery, burglary and motor vehicle crime in the past 12 months.

Police chiefs outside London are also preparing for crime to start rising,

18.5%

rise in house burglaries in London

Source: Metropolitan Police

particularly in the major urban areas. One chief constable said: "We are just about holding the line, but there are clear signs that burglary and robbery are on the turn." Another said: "I don't think the rubber has hit the road yet."

Sir Paul Stephenson, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, told MPs on the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee yesterday he was "concerned about robbery and burglary that seem to be going up".

In a report for tomorrow's meeting of the Metropolitan Police Authority, Sir Paul discloses a rising trend of property

crime in the three months between February and April compared with the same period last year. Kenneth Clarke, the Justice Secretary, told the Commons last week that burglary was one of the crimes that is "rising at the moment", adding: "It is going up rather alarmingly compared with a year ago."

Ministers are nervous that rises in property crime herald the long awaited recession crime wave that will worsen if unemployment increases substantially and people have less cash in their pockets.

Any increase threatens to undermine the Conservatives' reputation on law and order at a time when the Government is introducing plans to overhaul sentencing with the aim of sending thousands of fewer offenders to jail. "There are indications that crime is about to turn. The reason it has not gone up yet is because unemployment has not risen that much," one minister admitted.

Robbery, including muggings, pick-pocketing, burglary, shoplifting, theft of bicycles and interfering with motor vehicles increased, the Metropolitan Police report says. Figures show that there were more than one thousand more burglaries last month compared with May last year.

Robberies in the capital rose by 15 per cent in May, year-on-year, from 3,257 to 3,749; house burglaries rose by 18.5 per cent from 4,410 to 5,228; and thefts of and from vehicles by 6 per cent to 9,299. Sir Paul's report explains

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