

Stopping Shoplifters

Crime Prevention experts generally agree that the best deterrent to shoplifting is an alert, well-trained sales staff which pays careful attention to the needs of the customers. It is also helpful if the physical layout of the store gives employees a clear, unobstructed view of merchandise and customers.

Most shoplifters are amateurs who steal impulsively when opportunities arise. Shoplifters come from all socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, sex and age categories. They shy away from any situation where they get a lot of attention.

Every store should have a definite policy regarding shoplifters. All employees should be thoroughly acquainted with the policy. Check with your local law enforcement agency for a detailed guideline of apprehension and evidence requirements.

The following guidelines are designed to help store managers create policies, procedures, and physical deterrents to minimize the chances of shoplifting losses. For additional assistance in employee training and for a security survey of your business, contact the Crime Prevention Unit at 769-7407.

Shoplifting Prevention Tips

- Establish a store policy that **SHOPLIFTERS WILL be prosecuted.** Yes, your employee will have to spend some time in court, but after a few incidents and establishing a reputation for prosecuting, the problem will lessen.
- **“Shoplifters Will be Prosecuted”.**
- In-Store Video surveillance. Different systems have different features and pricing, but consider digital, internet based systems. Well placed cameras with at least one monitor in view of the front entry to prove cameras are real will have an instant affect on shoplifters entering the store.

- **ALWAYS** staff the store with at least 2 employees, more depending on business, merchandise type, and coverage area.
- Increase visibility in and out of your store. Limit advertising posters, move them lower on the glass so passersby can see activity inside, employees can see people approaching and leaving the store.
- Display merchandise so that employees can easily watch the movement of customers. Avoid narrow, cluttered aisles and maintain an open, neat appearance throughout the store. Avoid long, unbroken aisles and leave space between display cases. Keep displays at a medium height so that employees can see across the top of them. Arrange items neatly so that anything missing can be quickly noticed.
- Make sure the entire store is well lit.
- Optical, mechanical, and electronic devices can be used against shoplifters. Convex mirrors should be placed so that several areas of the store can be seen in one glance. Peepholes and one-way mirrors are also useful for observation of customers. Consider the use of a closed circuit television surveillance system (above) and electronic theft detection devices.
- Place cash registers away from doors, but in clear view from the outside. The cashier should have an unobstructed view of the store.
- Raise the floor behind the register so staff can better survey the store.
- Divide the store into sections and assign each employee the responsibility of covering specific sections. Never leave a section unattended. Schedule employees' working hours with adequate floor coverage in mind.
- Encourage employees to circulate throughout their sections and to serve all customers as promptly as possible. If a customer enters the store while another is being helped, the newcomer's presence should be acknowledged with the words, “I'll be right with you.”
- Develop a warning system for alerting employees that a shoplifter is suspected.
- Uniformed personnel, store detectives and guards are useful in deterring shoplifters.
- Control entry and exit at the store. Consider one-way turnstiles or separate doors for entry and exit.
- If merchandise is sold in pairs, display only one of the pair.
- Remove empty hangers from clothing racks after articles of clothing have been purchased. Require customers to check articles of clothing when entering and leaving fitting rooms. Post signs indicating the maximum number of clothing articles allowed in a dressing room at one time. Many stores have found three items to be the maximum controllable limit.
- Do not place more than one valuable item on a counter at the same time. Keep the more expensive items in locked display cases or counters, and never leave a display case unlocked.
- Establish clear cash register procedures. The register should be open only while it is actually being used. The cash drawer should be closed before merchandise is packaged. Cashiers should be alerted to avoid distractions from other customers while helping someone at the cash

- register. Keep cash registers locked and remove the key when they are not in use.
- At check out counters, look inside items such as trash cans, ice chests, tool boxes, shoe boxes, and purses for concealed merchandise.
- Cashiers should double check the price of any item which seems to be inaccurately marked.
- To aid in observation and to restrict exit points, check stands and check out lanes should be closed or blocked off when not in use.
- Give customers receipts for all purchases. Do no make refunds without requiring a sales receipt. Keep the store clear of discarded sales receipts.

What to Look For:

- Watch the customer's hands and eyes. Jittery eyes and nervous hands often indicate a shoplifter.
- Keep a watchful eye on customers who just wander about the store.
- Watch out for customers who avoid the attention of employees.
- Keep an eye on people who wear baggy clothes or heavy outer garments out of season.
- Shoplifters sometimes enter the store carrying bundles, bags, boxes, briefcases, top coats, umbrellas, oversized packages, musical instruments, or books to conceal merchandise. Post signs that require every customer to check packages at the door or with a checker before they shop. Seal packages which are sold so that they cannot be used to conceal other items.
- Look out for customers who try to divert the clerk's attention. Shoplifters sometimes ask for more articles than the clerk can control, disrupt a display or simply engage a clerk in conversation while an accomplice does the thieving.

- Shoplifting techniques are as varied as the imagination. Train employees to be alert and to watch for signs that could indicate a shoplifter.
- **Remember, a store with a reputation for good security and a tough prosecution policy is a less likely target for shoplifters.**

For more information, or presentations to management and staff, call Sgt. Trevor Shelor in the Crime Prevention office at 769-7407.

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or 911**

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