



PREVENTING SHOPLIFTING

SDPD Crime Prevention

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Effective prevention begins with an aware and alert staff. The following tips deal with deterrent and prevention measures, display strategies, fitting room security, preventing ticket switching, anti-theft devices, educating employees, security personnel, and stopping a shoplifter. And because a great deal of shoplifting is done by Organized Retail Crime (ORC), you can help combat ORC by partnering with law enforcement and other retailers in sharing information that can lead to identifying, disrupting, and apprehending ORC crews. This can be done by joining the San Diego Organized Retail Crime Alliance (SDORCA). Go to its website at www.sdorca.org and apply to be a retail member.

DETERRENT MEASURES

- Greet customers as they enter the store. It is said that the ultimate deterrent is customer service.
- Make the shoplifters feel watched. Elevate the cashier's platform. Install mirrors that enable cashiers and sales people to see over and around displays. Install one-way glass in offices to enable employees to see into the store without being seen from the floor.
- Install digital Internet Protocol (IP) cameras with video-analytics software, so-called "smart" cameras, to cover cash registers, high-value merchandise displays, entrances, loading docks, etc. Where possible, these cameras should be installed at face level. They should be programmed to record and create an alarm when an alert condition for suspicious activity occurs, follow a suspected shoplifter through the store, provide high-quality images of ORC gang members and other shoplifters to local law enforcement agencies, and detect blocking, defocusing, and other tampering. The software should also combine video analytics with facial recognition. The cameras should be monitored in the store when an alert condition occurs and appropriate action taken.
- Install public view monitors (PVMs) at main entrances to let shoppers know that they will be under surveillance in the store. Install smaller PVMs that can provide high-definition facial imagery in areas with merchandise that is popular with shoplifters.
- Post signs warning against shoplifting. Emphasize that you will prosecute. The best way to discourage shoplifters and keep your business from being tagged as an easy mark is to take a get-tough attitude and prosecute on the first offense.

- Install delayed-egress hardware on all emergency-exit doors.
- Require sales receipts for merchandise returned. And swipe the returner's driver license or other photo ID so that person's return activity can be checked. Too many returns might indicate fraud and are a reason to deny more returns.

PREVENTION MEASURES

- Require that bags and packages be checked on entry or not be brought into the store.
- Check sales receipt against items in bags on exit. Mark receipts so they cannot be used again to take the item out of the store.
- Make spot checks of goods that may be attractive to shoplifters. If a large number are moving from the shelves, check the sales record to see if they are actually being sold. Increase surveillance and change display strategy if they are being stolen.
- Install lockdown devices on shopping carts.

DISPLAY STRATEGIES

- Display limited quantities of goods that are popular with shoplifters to deter shelf sweeping. And display them in high-traffic areas where shoplifters are more likely to be seen.
- Display goods that are popular with shoplifters in a ratcheted device that dispenses one item at a time.
- Keep small and expensive items out of reach or in locked display cases. Have sales people show only one item at a time from a case.
- Minimize the shoplifter's access to merchandise without inconveniencing customers.
- Keep display and clothing racks away from entrances and exits to discourage "hit-and-run" thieves.
- Alternate clothes hangers front-to-back to prevent thieves from quickly grabbing bundles of display clothing.
- Use good locks and "strong" glass in cases that contain expensive items to help prevent smash-and-grab thefts. The latter includes laminated and tempered glass, polycarbonate and plastic-acrylic sheets, and safety glass with a security film attached to the inside and the frame. It requires repeated blows to break through, which take time and make noise. A shoplifter faced with this task might give up and go look for easier merchandise to take.

FITTING ROOM SECURITY

- Keep fitting room doors locked when not in use.
- Install cafe doors to allow staff members to monitor fitting room use.
- Limit the number of items allowed to be taken into the dressing room.
- Post a sign that directs customers to see a sales person before taking items into a fitting room.
- Issue color-coded tickets and tags to indicate the number of items taken into fitting rooms.
- Use a return rack for unwanted items.
- Post signs in fitting rooms warning against shoplifting.

PREVENTING TICKET SWITCHING

- Use tamper-proof gummed labels.
- Attach tags with a hard-to-break plastic string.
- Use preprinted, not hand-written, price tags.
- Use concealed multiple price tags.

ANTI-THEFT DEVICES

- Attach anti-theft tags to your merchandise.
- Provide cashiers with a means of deactivating or removing the tags when items are paid for.
- Install security towers with Electronic Article Surveillance (EAS) systems at your exits. They will sound an alarm or otherwise alerts store employees when it senses an active tag, i.e., when someone takes a tagged item out of the store without paying for it and having the tag deactivated or removed.

- Use EAS systems that employ the latest technology. Systems can now alert store employees when a thief enters the store with a hidden booster bag, i.e., one with an aluminum foil lining that shields tagged items from the EAS system antennas. They can also detect and prevent jamming.

EDUCATING EMPLOYEES

Salespeople

- Watch for people with loose or baggy clothing inappropriate for weather, and people with large bags or other props, such as newspapers, strollers, briefcases, or umbrellas that can easily conceal merchandise.
- Pick up stray receipts around the store.
- Be aware of shoplifter's tactics to confuse and distract you. For example, when working in teams one shoplifter will create a disturbance, e.g., complaining loudly, staging a faint, or knocking over merchandise, to draw attention away from the other who is doing the lifting.
- Be attentive to people in your area. This helps legitimate customers and deters shoplifters. A simple "Can I help you?" or "I'll be with you in a moment" warns shoplifters they are being watched. Keep a close watch on people who seem nervous or refuse assistance.
- Cover their entire area of responsibility, even blind spots.
- Have another sales person cover your area when you leave the floor, e.g., to check for items in the stockroom.
- Be especially alert at when the store is crowded. Shoplifters often operate when sales people are busy helping legitimate customers.
- Watch for shoppers walking with short or unnatural steps, which may indicate that they are concealing lifted items.
- Watch customers' eyes. If they are looking at you they may need assistance or they may be thinking about shoplifting.

Cashiers

- Check the lower racks of shopping carts, watch for switched labels, look inside items that can also be used as containers for lifted items, e.g., tool boxes, jacket sleeves, waste baskets, etc.
- Check for factory seals on boxed items. And look inside if the boxes are not sealed.
- Staple receipts to the outside of packages.
- Check for and remove or desensitized electronic tags.
- Be familiar with the store prices. This can help prevent price switching.

Supervisors

- Keep employees alert by holding periodic review sessions on store shoplifting policies.
- Discourage socializing on the sales floor. A group of employees in one spot usually means inadequate coverage somewhere else.
- Schedule hours so that an adequate number of sales people are working at all times.
- Watch for customers lingering in one area, loitering near stock rooms or other restricted areas, or wandering aimlessly through the store.
- Watch for customers who consistently shop during the hours when few people are working in the store.
- Watch for customers who visit the store frequently, but make only token purchases.
- Be alert for disturbances that distract sales people and cashiers.
- Walk through the store regularly and look for things that don't seem quite right.

SECURITY PERSONNEL

A business can hire its own security personnel or contract with a security company for security services. Uniformed security personnel that patrol the business on foot can be a highly effective in deterring shoplifting as well as robberies and burglaries.

A business that hires its own security personnel must register with and obtain a Proprietary Private Security Employer (PSE) license from California Bureau of Security and Investigative Services (CBSIS). It can then hire and train persons who have registered with the CBSIS and have valid Proprietary Private Security Officer (PSO) licenses. A person must pass a criminal history check by the California Department of Justice and the FBI to obtain this license. The PSE must obtain authorization from the CBSIS to provide the initial 16-hour and continuing-education PSO training.

A business that contracts for private security services would deal with a Private Patrol Operator (PPO), who must register with the CBSIS and obtain a PPO license, for which there are numerous requirements. The PPO would provide Security Guards for the security services. Security Guards must also be licensed by the CBSIS. They will need to pass a criminal history check and complete a 40-hour training course.

Share photos of known and suspected shoplifters with other businesses in the area to create file of known or suspected shoplifters. These photos would be shown to employees so they can learn to recognize and watch these people closely if they come into the store again.

STOPPING A SHOPLIFTER

If you suspect that someone may be considering lifting something, approach the person and ask "Can I help you?" or "Can I ring that up for you?" If you suspect someone has lifted and concealed something, keep him or her in sight and notify a manager or security personnel immediately. If you are working alone, request the assistance of another worker. Plan a "buddy system" for your own safety and as a witness.

If someone leaves your store without paying for an item, have an employee follow the suspect and get a good description of him or her and any vehicle used, and call **911** to report the crime. Do not have your employee attempt to detain the suspect unless he or she has been trained in apprehension and arrest procedures.

See California Penal Code Sec. 490.5(f) for the "merchant's privilege" in detaining a person suspected of shoplifting. It deals with the need for probable cause that an item has been unlawfully taken, use of force, period of detention, limits on searches, defenses in civil actions brought by a detained or arrested person, etc. Note that store employees do not have to "Mirandize" suspects before questioning them, i.e., they do not have to tell suspects that they have a right to remain silent, that anything they say can be used against them in court, etc.

RECOVERING STOLEN GOODS

Install cameras outside to track suspects to their vehicles and out of the parking lot. Get vehicle descriptions and license plate information.