

THEFT FROM SHOPS



FIRST PRINCIPLE

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Top Tips

Train all staff in non-confrontational deterrent techniques – it is always better to deter a potential thief

Keep high value products under close surveillance and away from the exits

Ensure there is good natural surveillance in all areas of the premises

Ban known offenders from your premises

Work with partners to stay alert to potential offenders

Have a policy for fitting room security

PREVENT CRIME

PROTECT COMMUNITIES



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This guide is designed to help businesses create a hostile environment for criminals by identifying key characteristics of shoplifting behaviour and explaining a range of techniques that can be used to reduce the risk of shoplifting. Take a more proactive approach to tackling shoplifting before it occurs in order to make you shop a safer working environment for staff, a safer experience for customers and to reduce the demand on police resources.

Definition of shop lifting

The Theft Act 1968 defines theft as:

'A person is guilty of theft if (s)he dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention to permanently deprive the other of it'

Definition of a shop lifter

Shoplifters come from all genders, nationalities, backgrounds and ages. Motivations will vary too – financial gain is usually the main motivating factor but peer pressure and even threats from others may be motivating offenders. Mental health can also be a feature for some who steal goods. It is important that businesses recognise that to ensure that, whilst they may be able to identify their 'regular' shoplifters, they have a broad spectrum of options to deter theft whatever motivates the offender.

There are some common behaviours that may help you identify a potential shoplifter.

- Spending more time watching staff and looking for CCTV cameras and other customers than shopping.
- Carrying large bags. Foil lined bags are often used to conceal goods with security tags. Obviously not a sign in its own right, but certainly worthy of monitoring.
- Wearing clothing inappropriate to the season such as heavy coats, to conceal items.

- Appearing nervous, even sweating or shaking, apparently checking a watch or bag and picking up items without showing any genuine interest.
- Repeatedly refusing offers of help.
- Frequently enters the store but does not purchase anything.
- They may enter in a group, with one or two members causing a scene to distract staff whilst another conceals goods unnoticed.

Common shoplifting techniques

Whilst each shoplifter will have their own preferred method of stealing items, there are some common techniques to look out for. The techniques will vary according to many factors including the size/value of the item, the layout of the store, the motivation of the offender and the security measures in place.

Concealment

Most shoplifter will seek to conceal items and then leave the store without generating attention. They may use bags or coats as identified above, but also hide items within or under a pushchair, dropping items into an umbrella or placing smaller items within larger items which are not detected during payment. Clothing shops with changing rooms are particularly attractive as items of clothing can be worn out of the store without generating attention.

Distraction

A lone offender may ask a member of staff to check for stock and then take items whilst the

shop floor is empty. Sometimes offenders will work in groups where one will steal whilst others cause a distraction. This could be an apparent medical emergency, making a complaint or asking for directions or assistance.

Grab and Go

Some offenders will favour the brazen approach, relying on the element of surprise and slow reactions of staff. This is particularly effective in stores with large quantities of desirable items close to the exits.

Fraud

Shoplifters will change price tags or even remove items from the store and try to seek a refund, even though they have not paid for it.

Shoplifters will look for opportunities to steal when they are less likely to be caught. Key times include:

- When staff are busy with other customers.
- During a shift change when there may be less staff on duty.
- When a delivery is being unloaded.

How to deter shoplifting

When you are planning your business, it is, understandably, likely to be your potential customers who are at the forefront of your mind. However, the most effective security will be based on seeing the business through the offender's eyes. Think about factors that would help make stealing easier – privacy, lack of supervision and easily accessible items are likely to be high on the list. Don't rely on one measure alone – the most effective protection is always to have several layers of security.

Carry out the following self-assessment at least once a year to check your level of security against shoplifters

Theft from Shops Self-Assessment		
Deter You should always aim to deter theft from occurring rather than try and catch those who have committed an offence.		
Check	Yes/No	Further Information
Do you have a policy to Meet and Greet? Meet and greet people as they enter the store and ask them if they require help as they shop.		Genuine customers will enjoy that level of service and it may be enough to deter a shoplifter. Having alert and attentive staff who willingly engage with customers rather than chatting to fellow staff will send out a strong message that staff are more likely to notice and react to suspicious behaviour. <i>Whilst most shoplifters will not pose a risk to staff, those under the influence of drugs or alcohol, with mental health issues or simply determined thieves, may do so. Staff should be made aware how to identify risk factors and the company policy on dealing with shoplifters made clear to them.</i>

<p>Do you have a code that can alert all staff to the presence of a potential shoplifter?</p>		<p>Experienced shoplifters will know many of the alerts used and will leave the store if they hear.</p> <p>You could have a word or sound and make use of the Tanoy system if you have one. Consider changing this every so often to make it more difficult for the potential offenders. Make sure all staff are aware of potential behaviours of a shoplifter as described above, they know the code and what they are expected to do.</p>
<p>Do you have Red routes?</p>		<p>Identify routes where thefts (or concealment) are most likely to occur and advise staff that they must walk those routes as often as possible when they move around the store.</p>
<p>Have you considered or do you use false alarms to deter offenders?</p>		<p>Confident and experienced staff, able to assess the risks, may wish to try tactics such as looking at the potential offender and talking to a colleague to let them know you have seen them. You may also wish to let the suspect know you have called police, even if you only pretend to do so to panic them into leaving. If you have an alarm system near the door, use a tagged item to set it off as the shoplifter heads towards the door – this again may make them panic and leave the premises without the item. It must be stressed that any of these methods may lead to confrontation and should only be employed by experienced staff and where there is no reason to suspect that the shoplifter will react negatively.</p>

<p>Are you a member of a Watch Scheme?</p>		<p>Find out if there a watch scheme in your area and join in. This may be something town wide where premises are linked by radios or something more informal with a few premises keeping each other alert via a What's app group. If there isn't a scheme, set one up yourself. Search for 'BID (<i>& the name of your town</i>)' (Business Improvement District) for details of formal schemes in your area.</p>
<p>Do you have good CCTV and are you able to operate it effectively?</p>		<p>Well positioned, high quality CCTV that covers the whole store can be a valuable deterrent to potential shoplifters. Make regular checks to ensure that the images are not obscured by changing store layouts and ensure there are no blind spots. Even if those areas contain low value items, shoplifters will take high value items to those black spots in order to conceal them. Make sure you always have a member of staff trained to download the images available.</p> <p>For further details on CCTV please see: Commercial CCTV Guidance</p>
<p>Have you banned known offenders?</p>		<p>You are within your rights to ban anyone from your shop if you believe they have stolen or pose a risk of stealing from your premises. You may also wish to consider this for anyone who persistently causes a nuisance. Ideally, hand them a letter to show them that they are banned and then let all staff know to ensure that everyone enforces the ban. If you are part of a scheme let others know.</p>

Do you have Security staff and are they effective?		Whilst it is important to embed a security culture within the whole organisation, efficient security personnel can provide a deterrent especially to prolific offenders whom they will recognise and can ask to leave the shop immediately. The priority for security staff, as with all staff, is to deter and disrupt thefts rather than wait until a theft has occurred.
Do you have Electronic tagging system and staff respond to alarms quickly?		Tagging items that activate an alarm at the final exit can be effective <u>but only if staff respond to every alarm quickly.</u>
Do you Monitor trends?		Keep a record of stock levels and losses throughout the day/week/year to determine any patterns. Review and if necessary increase your security ready for those peak times.
Do you use mystery shoplifters?		Ask a trusted person to try stealing an item from your store to test your procedures, including CCTV coverage and staff reactions. Share the results with the team.
<p>Store Layout</p> <p>The way your store is laid out can play a big part in your crime prevention layout</p>		
Are goods stored close to entrances and exits?		Never store high value, high risk or new stock close to the door. These are the items most likely to be taken and it is too easy for shoplifters to walk in, grab a load of items and run out before staff have even noticed their presence.
Do you have good natural surveillance?		Even if you have CCTV, make sure that staff on the shop floor have a good view around the store. High shelves, narrow aisles and dead ends all make it easy for shoplifters to work undetected. Tills

		should be placed close to the doors so that staff can monitor people leaving the store. Consider using convex mirrors on the walls to maximise opportunities for surveillance. Think about natural surveillance into and out of the premises too. Staff should be able to see out of the store to see if suspicious people are in the area.
Are you managing your fitting rooms properly?		If you are unable to have a member of staff in the fitting rooms at all times, consider locking the room and advise customers that staff will be happy to assist if they require the changing rooms. If you can have an attendant on the door, they should monitor the items being taken in and out and be wary of shoplifters either wearing shop items when they leave or attempting to conceal non-clothing items in the changing rooms. A pre-numbered tagging system will prevent disputes over the number of items that have been taken into the room.
Are your entrances and exits managed correctly?		Turn-styles at the entrance and exits will delay someone trying to exit the store quickly without paying. Remote control entry lock systems can assist in deterring unwanted customers. It will also let you position your CCTV camera to capture the best possible facial image of all customers.
Have you considered the area outside your premises?		Don't forget to review what goes on outside your premises too. For example, a passageway beside your premises may facilitate

concealment and /or escape. Investigate if you can install gates on the passageway or consider CCTV.

Display of Goods
The way you display your goods can also play a big part in your crime prevention layout

Our top tips for displaying valuable and desirable items		High value and desirable items should be placed in areas of maximum surveillance by staff. This may include behind the till area.
		Consider using empty boxes and locked cabinets for display purposes. Laminated glass will increase the protection for valuable items and keys should be limited to specific staff.
		Only display what you can realistically expect to sell during trading hours and replenish as necessary.
		Make it hard for someone to grab numerous items and leave the store quickly. This could be something as simple as hanging clothes with the hangers pointing in alternating directions or clear plastic restrictors on the shelves. Advise staff to be aware of anyone who might be tampering with the display to make it easier to return and grab a quantity of items.

Rule Setting		
The way you display your goods can also play a big part in your crime prevention layout		
Do you have a policy for civil recovery and enforcement? Have you made customers and staff aware?		Use signs to let potential shoplifter know that you have a policy on theft and make sure you enforce it. Make use of civil recovery options and simply ask people if they can pay for the item and then ban them from the store. <i>Always call police if the offender is under 18, a prolific offender, has mental health issues or is in any way violent.</i>
Do you have a receipt and refund policy?		Ensure that every purchase has a receipt and that your policy requiring the receipt for a refund is clearly displayed. Ensure that any discarded receipts are disposed of immediately and securely.
If you have CCTV – have you displayed the correct signage?		If you have CCTV in store you must display signs to let everyone in the premises know it is present. Use the CCTV checklist to make sure you can use your system effectively.
If you are a member of a watch scheme, have you made customers aware?		If you are part of a watch scheme with other premises, display notices advertng that you are a member. If you have an agreement that offenders banned from one store will be banned from all others in the scheme, promote that too.

<p>Do you have a policy to report all incidents to police?</p>		<p>Unless it is an emergency, this is best done on line https://www.suffolk.police.uk/contact-us/report-something/1-report-it-retail-theft This allows us to direct resources most efficiently but also sends a message out to the criminal community that the risks are higher at your store. Consider the use of a proforma to encourage staff to record as many details as possible about the incident and offender.</p>
<p>Have you taken steps to control access within the store?</p>		<p>Ensure that stock rooms, offices, staff rest areas and anywhere else that is private is secure except to those with a genuine need. Make sure that fire exits are alarmed and make sure that staff adhere to those rules too. For example, if doors are left insecure after staff use them as a short cut to leave the store, shoplifters will also take advantage of them as escape routes or secluded locations to conceal goods.</p>

CCTV Checklist

If you use a CCTV System in your business, you will find more information on our website under the 1st Principle advice section
 You can also complete the following simple check to make sure your CCTV is effective

Is the video signal from cameras recorded at a minimum of 6 frames per second?	
Do you have a nominated person available at all times who is trained and able to replay recordings and produce copies for the police?	
Does the nominated person know the retention period of recordings?	
Is your system able to quickly export video and stills onto a removable storage medium e.g. CD/DVD with the time and date integral to the relevant picture and without any drop-in quality?	
Do your exported images include any software needed to view or replay the pictures?	
Is your equipment and installation compliant with BS EN 50132-7?	
Is your system capable of saving and securing recorded images for review or export at a later date? <i>Information should be kept secure and retained for no longer than is necessary for the purpose of the system. A minimum of 14 days is recommended for small CCTV systems.</i>	
Do you check your system clock? <i>The system clock should be set correctly and kept accurate (taking account of GMT and BST). This will be very important if a police investigation is carried out.</i>	
Is your system Password Protected?	
Do you know the make and model of your CCTV?	
Would you like advice on how to use/upgrade/improve your system?	

Date of Self-assessment	Carried out by
Proposed Actions	

First Principle: Related links

Check out all of our Crime Prevention information using the following links or by using the QR code to take you to the First Principle Pages Alternatively go to our website at <https://www.suffolk.police.uk/> and look in the 1st Principle A-Z of Crime Prevention.

Allotment Security
Anti-Social Behaviour
ATM Security
Beach Hut Security
Boat Security
Building Site Security
Business Security
Caravan Security
Caravan Storage
Card Security
Catalytic Converters
Church Security
Cold Callers
Commercial CCTV
Counterfeit Banknotes
County Lines Advice
for Landlords
Cyber Crime
Cycle Security
Dangerous Dogs
Dog Fouling
Dog Theft
Domestic CCTV
Domestic Violence
Farm Security
Fraud Prevention
Grooming
Hate Crime

Heating Oil
Home Improvements
Home Security
Home Security for
Tenants
Horses and Stables
Keyless Vehicles
Key Safe Security
Lock Snapping
Mopeds and Scooters
Motorcycle Security
Neighbour Disputes
Occupiers Liability
Personal Security
Power Tool Security
Products Brochure
Rural Crime
Security Alarms
Sheds and Garages
Social Media
Social Media for
Parents
Suspicious Behaviour
Shoplifting
Taxi Driver Safety
Vehicle Security
Windows and Doors



Other Links you might find helpful

Ask the Police
Secured by Design
Sold Secure

Crimestoppers
0800 555 111

Victim Care
0300 303 3705