

## SHOPLIFTING PREVENTION AND TIPS

Shoplifting is an expensive problem facing all businesses in America today. Consumers pay higher retail prices for goods as merchants pass on their costs as a result of shoplifting.

Shoplifting is the theft of property offered for sale. The police and the security industry can help merchants in their efforts to properly prevent and apprehend shoplifters. No store can be completely immune to shoplifters. However, proper inventory procedures, merchandise display, and employee alertness can prevent most of these losses.

When you see a person take, conceal and attempt to leave the store without paying for an item it is shoplifting. The shoplifter can be apprehended by the clerk who witnessed the theft, a police officer, or a licensed security officer only after he/she has passed the checkout counter or has left the store.

There are many methods used by shoplifters to conceal merchandise and cover up the act. Some examples:

- Exiting the store with merchandise exposed either openly carried or worn by the shoplifter.
- Concealing the merchandise through a variety of means and walking out of the store. The means may include packages, shipping bags, purses, briefcases, paper bags, or loose coats with large pockets, or booster cages (an item used to aid their theft) which are hollow cages designed to make a woman seem pregnant. Stolen articles are placed inside the cage.
- Shoplifters will use fitting rooms to place an outer garment over the merchandise and then walk out of the store.
- Some brazen shoplifters will grab an armload of merchandise and run out of the store.
- Distracting the employee's attention away from the shoplifter e.g. being too friendly or belligerent or demanding of attention.

There are certain telltale characteristics of shoplifters that store owners should watch for:

- Seem nervous and do not want any assistance.
- Spend more time watching the sales staff than looking at the merchandise. The thief usually checks to see if anyone is watching before they commit their act of theft.
- Leave a sales area in a hurry. They may have concealed the merchandise and are in a hurry to make their exit.
- Wear overcoats or raincoats when the weather does not call for it.
- Come into the store with a group of youngsters. Much shoplifting perpetrated by juveniles is a result of peer pressure or on a dare.
- Don't seem interested in the articles they have requested to look at, or that they have in their hands.
- Cause disturbances in the store. Remember shoplifters often operate in teams; one will distract an employee while another steals.
- Take more than one item into the dressing room. They sometimes come out with only one with the other worn under the shoplifter's own clothes.
- Loiter or frequent washrooms or fitting rooms.
- Pick up a lot of merchandise with no apparent attempt to purchase.

To prevent shoplifting merchants can deter the thief by proper physical store layout and numerous other means. The following suggestions are offered:

- Keep displays of merchandise away from all doors.
- Keep cash registers and display counters clear of items which obstruct view.
- Keep aisles clear.
- Entrances and exits should be visible to store personnel.
- Pay attention to all customers who enter your business. Acknowledge their presence by saying something like, "I'll be with you in a moment."
- Never leave the business, or even a department, unattended, and try not to turn your back on customers.
- Give each customer a receipt for his/her purchase. Keep checkout areas clear of discarded sales receipt - shoplifters often use these as proof of purchases.
- Remove from the cash register area any merchandise that customers do not purchase. Return such items to stock as soon as possible.
- Don't allow customers to distract the cashier while another person is being checked out. Keep the cash register locked whenever possible.
- Lock up expensive merchandise and any other merchandise likely to be taken in showcase displays. Arrange display cases in such a manner that more than one employee can see them.
- Merchandise sold in pairs, such as shoes, should be displayed singularly.
- If the store is small, have a buzzer or bell that sounds when the front door is opened.
- Greet every customer you meet. Let customers know you are aware of their presence.
- Enforce a strict anti shoplifting policy ("Shoplifter Will Be Prosecuted") and advertise your aggressive anti shoplifting policy in plain view.
- Sections of the store, such as cash registers, fitting room, exits, etc., should never be left unattended.
- Control backpacks, bags and other items brought in by customers.
- Watch persons wandering aimlessly up and down store aisles, fingering objects and frequently glancing at employees and other customers.
- Keep valuable away from store exits to prevent grab and run situations. Clothes-hanger hooks should be alternated to prevent theft from the grabber.
- Expensive merchandise should be in locked display cases in an area close to where salespeople are located.
- Use an electronic shoplifting deterrence system or electronic Article Surveillance (EAS) system.
- Alert other employees immediately if you notice suspicious activities. You may want to use a code if the store has a public address system.
- Watch for price switching. Cashiers should do price checks if warranted.
- Have cashiers check every item being sold to make sure it does not contain other merchandise.
- Each customer should receive a receipt for every purchase. This prevents the shoplifter from returning stolen items for a cash refund.
- Every bag should be stapled closed, with the sale receipt attached. If possible, spot-check sales receipts at exits.
- Control exits by designing exit lanes so that all persons leaving the store must pass by the scrutiny of a cashier or other employee.

If you suspect a shoplifter you can approach a person and tell him or her they are being watched, or ask them to leave the premises if they are not intending to buy anything or are just loitering.

To prosecute a shoplifter, you must see the person take and conceal the item and attempt to leave the store without paying for same. The shoplifter must be watched continuously to verify the merchandise has not been paid for or "ditched." The apprehension of a shoplifter should always be made after the person has passed the checkout counter or has left the establishment.

When calling the police, inform them whether:

- suspect is still present
- suspect is causing trouble
- If suspect has fled, give complete description, direction of escape, etc.

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