

Shoplifters

Courtesy Edmonton Police Service

Shoplifters are of every age, sex, and race. Some of your regular customers are "*beating inflation*" by stealing a little each time they shop.

The shoplifter may appear to be just another customer, so look for deviations from normal shopping patterns:

EYE MOVEMENT

The shoplifter will be handling merchandise but not looking at it. The eyes will be watching everyone except the item being handled.

THE WANDERING SHOPLIFTER

Suspect the customer who goes from item to item, but never really shows much interest in merchandise and always examines the other customer.

SEEKING PRIVACY

Watch the customer who takes merchandise into isolated areas of the store where observation is difficult. Limit the number of items taken into dressing rooms.

SHOPLIFTING TOOLS

Look for large empty purses, backpacks, duffle bags, empty boxes, a coat slung over one shoulder, bags from other stores, old wrinkled shopping bags, a newspaper under the arm, bulky over-clothing such as coats or sweaters when worn out of season.

Shoplifting methods, amateur or professional, can be broken down into three categories:

1. CONCEALMENT

- Shoplifters most commonly conceal stolen merchandise on their person or in their clothing, inside shopping bags, purses, hats or even umbrellas.
- Another method of concealment is palming an item and keeping it in the hand until out of the store (e.g. jewellery or small expensive items).
- Small items are often stripped of their packaging, price tags and other identifiers to disguise the newness of the product and reduce bulk.
- Shoplifters also hide items within another package which is then purchased.

2. SUBTERFUGE

- Shoplifters may use an accomplice to distract the merchant.
- Shoplifted articles may also be handed off to an accomplice.
- Price tag switching and fraudulent refunding are variations of shoplifting which may be hard to detect.
- The refunder may take merchandise directly from your shelves to the refund desk, or the shoplifter may steal the item from another store and return it to you.

3. SPEED

- Desperate vagrants, alcoholics or juveniles often make no attempt to conceal merchandise - they "grab and run".
- Self-assured professionals, while they may not run, will walk into your store, pick up an item and walk out, knowing that few will react quickly enough to stop them.

REFUND FRAUD - A GROWTH PROBLEM

A refund control policy should require a sales slip. Also request the name, address and phone number, plus driver's license verification. A card file should be maintained on returns to cross check frequent refunders. Refunds should be followed up by phone or mail to verify legitimacy or information given. In questionable circumstances, you might consider mailing large refund cheques rather than paying cash. Locate the refund desk near the store entrance to prevent "refunding" of unpaid for merchandise.

PREVENTING SHOPLIFTING

Many of the best crime prevention suggestions are nothing more than good business. Some of the most effective methods are:

EMPLOYEE AWARENESS OF CUSTOMERS

Customers should be personally greeted as they enter the store. An exchange of pleasantries serves to remove the shoplifters cloak of anonymity, while increasing customer goodwill. Shoplifters avoid stores with friendly, attentive sales people. (Example: "Can I help you?" "I'll be with you in a minute." "If you need help, just nod - I'm sure to see you.")

TRAINING

Special shoplifting prevention training for both new and continuing employees will guarantee that sales people are aware of the shoplifting problem and know what steps to take should they see a shoplifter.

PROSECUTION

Adopt a clear, evenly enforced shoplifting policy. The best way to discourage shoplifters is by prosecuting even on the first offense.

ADEQUATE SALES STAFF

Hire enough sales staff to guarantee effective coverage and personal attention to customers. Breaks and lunch hours should be staggered.

STORE LAYOUT

Shelves and displays should be low for good visibility. Lighting should be adequate so that the sense of privacy is removed. High value and small item displays are ideally located near a cash register. Aisles which can be viewed from the register provide for limited opportunities to shoplifters.

A NEAT STORE

A messy store lets the shoplifter know that the store management is inattentive. Empty hangers should be removed, depleted displays filled, discarded sales receipts picked up, price marking materials kept off the floor, and fitting rooms kept clean.

There are many useful but sometimes resisted procedures which can dramatically reduce shoplifting losses:

- **FITTING ROOM CONTROLS:**

Either checkers, or a limit on the number of items, or a tag system to verify the number of pieces brought into the fitting rooms.

- **SECURING BAGS:**

Tape or staple the receipt to the outside of the bag.

- **SIGNS:**

Identify displays of frequently shoplifted items. Such signs make the shoplifter feel that he is under observation.

- **MIRRORS:**

By removing the sense of privacy in out-of-the-way corners, convex mirrors deter shoplifters.

- **PRICE TAGS:**

Disintegrating adhesive tags can limit price switching. An extra, concealed second tag is also a good idea.

- **CLOTHING HANGERS:**

Alternate the direction of hanger hooks to prevent grab-and-run losses from clothes racks near entrance/exit doors.

If shoplifting losses cannot be brought under control using these recommendations, then special devices and security personnel may be in order.

1. **STORE DETECTIVES**

Monitor suspicious persons and apprehend shoplifters.

2. **OBSERVATION BOOTHS AND TWO-WAY MIRRORS**

Are useful if monitored regularly.

3. **GARMENT CABLES AND CHAINS**

Require the sales clerk to unlock the clothing before it is tried on.

4. **A CABLE OR LOOP ALARM**

Is strung through some part of the article. If the cable is cut or unplugged the alarm is triggered.

5. **SPECIAL LOCKING HOLDERS**

Are made for items such as calculators and cameras. These allow the customer to operate and inspect a display item which is secured to the counter.

6. **LOCKED DISPLAY CASES**

Are necessary with many small expensive items.

7. **ALARMS**

Pressure sensitive mats and switches can be used to set off an alarm to tone to alert staff when someone enters the business.

8. **ELECTRONICALLY SENSED TAGS**

May be affixed to merchandise by rivets, plastic string or by concealment. If the tags are not removed before the customer exits, then an alarm will sound. This type of system has several drawbacks, including erratic use of tags, failure to

remove tags, and high costs. However, several department stores are using this system on a large scale with considerable success. It works best on "exit" rather than "department" coverage.