Crime Prevention

Preventing Shoplifting
- Guide for retailers

How to spot a shoplifter
A shoplifter may exhibit certain types of behaviour, and exert a certain body language which can arouse suspicion.

Things to look out for include:
- Attempting to avoid attention or being noticed
- Sweating / becoming flushed
- Repeatedly browsing - picking up and putting back the same items
- Eyes wandering, paying little attention to the product in their hand
- Locking around the store rather than products on the shelves
- Appearing nervous
- Wearing clothing which is not appropriate for the weather that may be used to conceal goods
- Carrying large bags

Train your staff to be vigilant and alert to recognise thieves.

Common shoplifting tactics
There are a number of shoplifting methods, understanding how people shoplift will help you prepare for preventing it.

Distraction theft – a group of people will enter a store and distract staff in order to steal.

Staff collusion – staff will work with ‘customers’ to steal goods or cash.

Bagging – items will be hidden within bags brought with thieves into the store. Metal lined bags will prevent any exit tagging alarm systems being activated.

Hiding merchandise – thieves may store goods in the under-tray of prams, or conceal them within clothing or handbags. Offenders may also hide items within the packaging of less expensive goods which they will purchase.

Walk out techniques – simply selecting items and walking out without any attempt to conceal the items. This can be effective if done without exhibiting any suspicious behaviour.

Price swapping – changing over price tags in order to pay a lower price at the till.

Fake returns – thieves will select an item in store and take it to the returns desk in an attempt to obtain a refund. Thieves may say that they have lost their receipt and threaten to speak to a supervisor if the cashier is non-compliant with the return.

‘Accidental’ Stealing – where a thief pays for one item at the till and holds another in view, or places it in a pocket etc. If caught, the offender can simply pass the theft off as an ‘accident’.

Detaining a shoplifter – your powers
Please always ensure that your personal safety is your first concern. Staff should be familiar in procedure for dealing with shoplifting incidents.

To undertake a citizen’s arrest you must:

KNOW an offence has taken place and KNOW that the person committed it. In other words, you need to witness the offence being committed. This is the best and safest criteria for an arrest.

Alternatively you can arrest if you:

KNOW an offence has taken place and REASONABLY SUSPECT the person has committed it.

You can only exercise your citizen’s power of arrest when it is not reasonably practical for a police officer to make the arrest for you. Additionally the arrest must be necessary to prevent the person in question:

- Causing physical injury to himself or any other person
- Suffering physical injury
- Causing loss of or damage to property; or making off before a constable can assume responsibility for him

In all cases you can use reasonable force to make the suspect comply with your instructions.

If an offender runs away make note of the direction they are travelling in, and note details of the incident including description of the offender and details of any vehicles to pass onto the police.

In an emergency call 999
For non-emergencies call 101
www.northants.police.uk

Northamptonshire Police is committed to the prevention and detection of crime including shoplifting. Northamptonshire Police target offenders who commit crime within the county and as such any information you may have regarding shoplifting offenders within your retail store should be passed as intelligence to Northamptonshire Police via the non-emergency number, 101.

This guide has been produced to help assist retailers reduce and minimise incidents of shoplifting.
Preventing Shoplifting

Your primary goal should be to deter shoplifters from your store and to prevent theft from occurring in the first instance. Remember not all recommendations will be suitable for every store; however a combination of appropriate measures will work better than using one method alone.

Good customer service = good crime prevention: By greeting genuine shoppers you provide a positive impression of your store, and increase the chance of future sales. Anybody thinking of shoplifting will be deterred by staff welcoming them into the store. An offender is less likely to shoplift if they sense that they are going to be seen and noticed by staff.

Don’t just watch someone shoplift: If someone is behaving oddly or suspiciously approach and offer assistance, ask if they need any help or advice on their purchase. Other disruption tactics include rearranging stock or tidying shelves in the same aisle combined with a greeting. Alternatively stand on guard by the exit. Let them know that they have been seen.

Use signage: Make it clear that shoplifting will not be tolerated by displaying signs by entrance doors.

Work in partnership: Consider joining a local retail crime initiative, by doing so you may be able to join a retail radio link and be made aware of known shoplifters to look out for. If you are part of a scheme utilise radio networks linked to CCTV, the police and other stores.

Install CCTV: As a guide, CCTV should cover entrances and exits (capturing images which can be used to identify persons entering and leaving the store). It should also cover high value and targeted stock. CCTV should ideally be monitored, at least during peak shoplifting times which will be unique to each store.

Make sure you have an Operational Requirement for your system (outlining your requirements and the system standards required). Ensure any CCTV system is registered with the information commissioner’s office – for more information visit www.ico.gov.uk. We encourage systems which are network capable, with identifiable playback software. Images should also be date and time stamped.

Security Personnel: Consider employing a security guard or store detective, if not full time at key times of the day or year.

Electronic Article Surveillance (EAS): Electronic security tags on merchandise with detectors that sound at the exit can act as a deterrent to thieves and raise the attention of staff.

Staff checks and key policies: Don’t just rely on electronic means of prevention (security tagging, CCTV) a clear policy of the prevention of theft alongside staff training can prevent crime. Frequent till checks and strict compliance with till procedures as well as CCTV covering till areas can prevent internal theft by staff.

What is shoplifting?
The Theft Act 1968 says that: a person who dishonestly takes property belonging to another, with the intention of permanently depriving the other of that property, is guilty of theft.

Good management practices, and key layout considerations:

- Reduce the number of exits, blind corners and recesses
- Carefully place mirrors
- Install entry / exit chimes
- Place expensive goods away from the entrances and exits
- Create clear lines of sight in aisles and reduce the height of displays
- Reduce crowding around display of high risk items
- Move ‘hot products’ into higher security zones with more staff surveillance
- Speed up the checkout to reduce congestion and waiting

Positioning of stock: Ensure that merchandise is not displayed near store exit or entrance doors - specifically high value and desirable goods such as alcohol.

Store Layout: Store design and layout can be a large contributing factor to shoplifting especially where staff’s ability to supervise shoppers is removed due to numerous exits, blind corners, hidden alcoves, and high displays etc. Store layout can be designed to ensure that there are limited or no blind spots in the store and to ensure customers pass the till area and staff in order to exit the store.

Increase store surveillance: Install mirrors to cover blind spots.

Other prevention considerations:

- Plastic screens in front of confectionary
- Limit the number of young people allowed in at one time, or insist on children being accompanied by an adult
- Decline entry to known offenders, asking them to leave if they have already entered the store
- Establish rules for changing rooms in clothing stores
- Install display hooks which means that each item has to be removed individually avoiding an entire ‘hook’ of stock being swept off and removed at once
- Use display boxes, where goods are collected at point of sale. Particularly for high value goods and electrical items
- Use good quality, secure, lockable display cabinets for high value goods
- Alarm unlocked exits (such as fire doors) and unused check outs
- Never leave cash registers unlocked or unattended

Know your own risks

Having a clear understanding of the key factors which contribute to shoplifting in your store is the first step to preventing it. You need to understand your top targeted items so that you can ensure your most valuable or most desirable goods are made less vulnerable to theft.

Most items stolen from shops are done so because they are concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable.

Not only do you need to understand your vulnerable stock, but you need to know your vulnerable days of the week, times of the year and times of the day so that you can actively plan to minimise theft during these peak periods.

There are 3 things which need to occur simultaneously for a crime to take place.

Firstly you need a suitable target (the items you sell), a motivated offender (someone who will steal), and a lack of capable guard (the absence of anyone seeing or being able to deal with a theft).

Simply, if an opportunity arises for an offender to steal valuable or desirable goods, with little or no chance of being caught, losses will occur.