

Shoplifting and forecourt fuel theft in Scotland are on the increase amid fears the cost-of-living crisis is pushing desperate people to resort to desperate measures.

A guide to Retail Crime Reduction to help prevent your business becoming a victim.



POLICE
SCOTLAND

Keeping people safe

POILEAS ALBA



Staff Policy

The first thing you as a retailer must do is determine what should happen when someone is caught stealing from your premises.

That way you and your staff will know exactly how to deal with it.

When should the police be called?

Will the value stolen make any difference to involving the Police?

In the absence of the manager who is responsible for making decisions relating to shoplifting?

At what point does it become obvious in your store that the shoplifter has no intention of paying for the item?

What will you do if the thief leaves your premises?

People caught stealing may offer varying reasons in the hope you will not involve the Police. Such reasons are usually untrue but it is up to the person dealing with the incident to use their judgement.



How it works...

Common methods of stealing property from shops -

Brassing It Out

Small items such as hats, gloves, scarves, jewellery and handbags are often stolen by shoplifters who walk quite brazenly out of shops while wearing them.

Camouflage

Involves the use of coats, jerseys or any other object big enough to place over and conceal items that are stolen.

Fitting Rooms

It is not uncommon for a thief to try on a new garment and cover it with their clothing before walking out of the shop. Another fitting room trick involves two people using one dressing room and switching garments for the other to try. This method is used to confuse shop staff about the number of garments taken into the room. Garments can also be passed from one cubicle to another.

Price Switching

Shoplifters substitute a lower priced ticket on higher priced merchandise.



How it works...

De-Tagging

Shoplifters often work in pairs or teams and use sophisticated methods to remove security tags and prevent alarms going off.

Angry Customer

Generally involves the 'suspect' shouting at the shop staff at the point of detention with the intention of drawing attention to their innocence and forcing staff to reconsider their actions. This usually means staff back down and let them go.

Trolley Push Out

Simply walking out of the store pushing a trolley as if they have paid for their items within the trolley when they have not done so.

Self Service Checkouts

In order to steal a product a person can pick up and pretend to be scamming the barcode. They can also scan and then later delete the product from the shopping list. Another method is to take five items, scan one and then input only four items at the self checkout.

Ringling The Changes

Criminals, often working in pairs, will request sums of money be changed and then set about distracting and confusing shop staff resulting in them being able to obtain more money than they were due.

This list is by no means exhaustive and there are variants on many of the methods used.



Tools of the trade

Like any other industry, shoplifters and thieves have equipment that they call the tools of the trade. They include:

Poachers Jacket

This is a garment fitted with numerous sizes of inside pockets that can be used to conceal stolen property.

Foil-Lined bags

Foil-lined bags that can disrupt security detection systems and are sometimes used by the professional shoplifter to steal merchandise.

The Use Of Children

Methods can include using children to 'unintentionally' push trolleys out of the store and using baby's prams or pushchairs to conceal stolen property.

Price Tags

Changing price tags is one of the easiest forms of theft to commit but can be very difficult to detect. This type of theft is committed by a person who removes a higher price tag and replaces it with a lower price tag, then purchases the item at the lower price.

Your Stock

The criminal enters the store or shop and takes an item, often electrical goods or clothing, and attends to 'return' the item stating they have lost their receipt. They then get a refund or another item with a legitimate proof of purchase.

Counterfeit Currency

Staff should be advised of the visual checks which can be made regarding the quality of both paper and print, the watermark and security thread. Advice leaflets are readily available from the various banks. Consider using ultra violet lamps for checking.

Good customer service is the single most effective method of deterring shoplifting.

By knowing where your customers are, offering them your assistance, acknowledging their presence and anticipating their needs you will undoubtedly help reduce shoplifting in your store.

Good customer care, coupled with alert shop assistants offering unobtrusive customer service, is a proven method of discouraging thieves who thrive on anonymity.





Prevention Methods

Ensure that all areas are adequately lit and that there are no concealed areas within the premises.

Always put merchandise away promptly.

Alternate the hooks on clothes racks to prevent big lifts of clothing.

Consider tagging all expensive items or random tagging and install associated signage.

Check the number of garments that are taken into fitting rooms and remove all surplus clothing after each customer leaves the fitting room area.

Count all money behind a locked door and not in full view of the general public.

Agree on maximum till levels and stick to them.

Empty the cash drawer regularly but vary the times.

Devise a discreet system to alert supervisors or other members of staff to the presence of a suspected thief. Move attractive and expensive merchandise away from exits or shop corners.

Never place expensive or desirable items near fire exits, toilets, staff areas, etc.

Areas continually targeted should be made a regular walk way for staff.

Try to locate most targeted items in line of sight of till staff.

Restrict the amount of valuable items on display. Boxed items could be removed and replaced on purchase.

If a customer is paying with large amounts of cash consider doubling up on staff to avoid a 'ringing the changes' scenario.

The use of accomplices is common amongst shoplifters, particularly professional gangs. A number of types of distraction can be used to draw the attention of shop staff and customers to a fictitious incident whilst other members of the gang steal from the premises. Look out for people:

Who stand in front of others to act as a shield or as a look-out.

Engage staff in meaningless conversation while an associate steals.

Moving high value goods from one rack to another to make it easier to steal unobserved.



Personal Safety

The personal safety of you, your staff and your customers is worth more than property and it is essential that staff training incorporates advice to staff that they should not take any risks. All retail premises should have a policy for the prevention of violence and ensure that all members of staff are made aware of it.

Aggressive confrontation of any kind is never acceptable and staff should be able to do their job without fear of physical harm or verbal abuse but there are some points staff can consider to assist them create a safer working environment.

The National Business Crime Centre has commissioned a series of videos designed as a training aid for those working in the retail sector to empower employees in the areas of personal safety and de-escalation, saying no - refusing service, deterring and interacting with thieves and handling disruptive behaviour.

<https://nbcc.police.uk/business-support/shopworker-videos>

Greet customers politely.

Be on the lookout for body language and signs of anger, tension or adopting a hostile and aggressive stance.

Keep your distance from threatening behaviour.

Get help by following protocols to summon assistance or by carrying a mobile phone or personal attack alarm.

The Protection of Workers (Scotland) Act was introduced in 2021. **This legislation creates a specific offence of abusing, threatening or assaulting a retail worker.**



Help & Support

The cost of living crisis means deprived communities across Scotland are **more** deprived.

Help and support is available across Scotland -

Addiction

www.alcoholanddrugsaction.org.uk

0333 3448 355

Drug and alcohol use support.

Foodbanks

www.foodaidnetwork.org

www.trusselltrust.org

www.nourishscotland.org

www.gov.uk/cost-of-living

Details of support available to help with the cost of living.

This includes income and disability benefits, energy crisis bills and allowances, childcare, housing and travel.