

SHOPLIFTING & STEALING

Shoplifting – which is stealing – accounts for up to 40% of reported shop losses annually. Shoplifters come from all walks of life and from all socio-economic backgrounds, but generally they fall into one of two groups – amateurs or professionals.

Amateur shoplifters usually steal on impulse. Juveniles (usually teenagers) who steal to impress friends form a big part of this group.

Professional shoplifters are more likely to work in pairs or groups, although they will work alone. They often steal to obtain a false refund for the items and have often "cased out" a store before stealing. Some are highly skilled thieves.

Preventing shoplifting

You can prevent shoplifting by taking some simple steps in the following areas:

- ▶ Store layout and design
- ▶ Staff education and training
- ▶ Business policy and procedure

Store layout and design

- ▶ Make the layout of your store as open as possible, with good visibility between aisle or areas
- ▶ Keep shelves tidy and goods neatly stacked
- ▶ Consider using surveillance mirrors so that staff can monitor awkward or hidden areas
- ▶ Consider CCTV and have it connected to a VCR
- ▶ If appropriate, consider having in-store security guards
- ▶ Where possible, lock expensive and portable goods in cabinets
- ▶ Stack goods tightly on your shelves, so that removal takes longer
- ▶ Limit the entry and exit points to your store
- ▶ Clearly display signs that state police will be called if anyone is caught stealing regardless of the excuse
- ▶ Clearly display signs explaining your bag checking policy
- ▶ Limit access to keys or locked cabinets

Staff education and training

Ensure your staff members understand:

- ▶ The store policy on both bag checks and stealing
- ▶ What you – or store management – expect of them under these policies
- ▶ The procedures you want them to follow if they suspect someone has stolen an item
- ▶ That the value of goods stolen can never outweigh the value of the health and well-being of employees

Encourage staff to:

- ▶ Greet customers as they enter the store
- ▶ Ask "Can I help you?"
- ▶ Regularly tidy shelves
- ▶ Pay attention to nervous or jumpy customers, people looking around in surveillance mirrors, groups, and customers who try to distract staff

Business policy and procedure

It may be your store's policy to conduct bag inspections. However, you do not have a legal right to search a person's bag or property. The person DOES NOT commit an offence by refusing to have their bag searched.

Clearly display signs that explain your store's policy, e.g. "All bags must be presented for inspection before leaving the store."

As mentioned above, ensure that your staff members are clear about your store's policies and procedures for dealing with suspected shoplifting incidents.

Dealing with shoplifters - About arrests

While it may be lawful to arrest a person in certain situations it is recommended good practise to have that person assist voluntarily.

Cooperation is a better strategy than the legal ramifications associated with an arrest. It is suggested that independent legal advice be sought about making arrests in this regard.

If the situation causes danger to you, your staff or customers, do not approach the offender. The value of goods can never exceed the value of your life.

If you decide to detain a suspected shoplifter:

- ▶ Explain who you are (e.g. The manager, store security guard) and show identification.
- ▶ Tell the person why they are being spoken to and ask them to accompany you back into the store.
- ▶ You do not have a legal right to use force unless the person has been arrested (force in this sense means a degree of force that any reasonable person would use if faced with the same situation).
- ▶ It is recommended that you do not physically touch the suspected shoplifter.
- ▶ Advise the person that police will be called.
- ▶ Ask the person to surrender any property which does not rightfully belong to them.
- ▶ You are not entitled to conduct searches of the person

Reporting incidents to police

Report all incidents to police. The police cannot help you counter shoplifting problems if they don't know you are experiencing them.

If a crime is in progress, or there is a risk to life or well-being, call 000. If it is not an emergency, report the incident to your local police.

Provide accurate information to the police about the circumstances surrounding the offence.

You will need to give police as many of the following details as you can including:

- ▶ Your name & contact details
- ▶ Your location and nearest cross street
- ▶ Type of incident (e.g. shoplifter)
- ▶ The full name and D.O.B of the offender (if you have it)
- ▶ The offender's current behaviour

Police will determine whether there is sufficient evidence to support the charges. They may ask you to give a statement, which describes what you saw, heard, said, did or touched.

The legal process

If the police decide there is sufficient evidence, the person may be charged by police. Once charged the person is referred to as the defendant.

The defendant can plead guilty to the offence or not guilty. If they plead not guilty, you may be required to give evidence at a hearing in the local court.

If the defendant is a juvenile (aged between 10 and 17 years) the Juvenile Justice Act specifies how they can be dealt with. Options open to police for dealing with juveniles are:

- ▶ Warning
- ▶ Caution
- ▶ Youth Offence
- ▶ Charge

Source - Police Crime Prevention Unit - Townsville