



Lee's Summit Police Department Shoplifting Prevention Guide



One of the most common non-violent crimes facing America today is shoplifting. Shoplifting is the theft of property offered for sale. Shoplifting is an expensive problem that ends up costing U.S. consumers and businesses billions per year. Businesses pay the costs of lost merchandise and security related expenses. Consumers pay higher retail prices for the goods because merchants pass on their costs. The Lee's Summit Police Department believes it is our responsibility to help merchants in their efforts to properly prevent and apprehend shoplifters.

Shoplifters represent every age group and income level. Anyone who enters a store could be a potential shoplifter. There are two types of shoplifters, professionals and amateurs. Professionals steal for a living while amateurs steal for a variety of other reasons. The reasons may include a simple desire to have the item, a desire to own luxury items, stealing for "the thrill of it", peer pressure or group status, they may experience an irresistible impulse to steal (kleptomaniac), to support a drug habit, they believe the store owes it to them, they steal out of desperate need such as a vagrant taking food or clothing, and the list goes on...

Common Methods Used By Shoplifters

Shoplifters develop and use methods that are the most suitable for the particular talents of the shoplifter, and the type of merchandise to be stolen. The various methods employed include:

- 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 the following:
- Palming or sleight-of-hand is the carrying of a small item out in their hand. Packages, gloves, newspapers, or other aids that are normally carried in the hand can be used to cover up the act.
- Using aids to conceal the property. The aids may include:

- Shopping Bags
- Umbrellas
- Books
- Strollers
- Diaper bags
- Purses
- Briefcases
- "Booster" Equipment. "Booster" is a slang term used by shoplifters for any equipment or item that is used to aid their thefts. Professional shoplifters may use these items:

- "Booster" coats are loose-fitting coats with large pockets in the lining to hide items. Some of these coats have exposed hooks sewn inside them to hang merchandise on.
- The wearing of skirts, pants, or other garments with elastic waistbands that can receive and hold stolen merchandise.
- Booster bloomers have a flexible elastic waistband with the legs tied off just above the knees. Items are dropped down from the waist.

- Booster cages are hollow cages designed to make a woman seem pregnant. Stolen articles are placed inside the cage.
- Using fitting rooms to practice their trade. Many different shoplifting techniques are used in fitting or dressing rooms where shoplifters feel secure and believe in the store's inability to detect their shoplifting activities. The most common method is when the shoplifter places an outer garment over the merchandise, and wears it out of the store.
- Talented, professional shoplifters can "crotch" merchandise between their legs and walk out of the store in a normal fashion. The shoplifter wears a long outer coat into the store, and carries out items between his/her legs.
- Some brazen shoplifters find a vulnerable store area near an entrance or exit, particularly those with a street immediately outside, where he or she can grab an armload of merchandise from a display and run out of the store.
- Employing diversion techniques sometimes works to distract employee attention away from the shoplifter. An accomplice occupies the attention of the clerk while the shoplifter does the stealing. Employees should be on the alert for distractions that may be used to divert attention from an accomplice, whether the customer is too friendly, belligerent, or demanding of attention.

Telltale Characteristics of Shoplifters

Store owners and employees should be observant for those customers who:

- Are carrying something in their hands throughout the store. Shopping bags, umbrellas, handbags, books, diaper bags, and baggy clothes are favorites for stuffing stolen items into. An open purse can make concealment easy for smaller items. Strollers and baby carriers are sometimes used to conceal merchandise.
- Seem nervous and who 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.
- Reach into display cases or walk behind counters. They may also attempt to enter stockroom areas or back hallways.
- Wear overcoats or raincoats when the weather does not call for it. Large inside pockets or hoods are great shoplifting techniques. The common trend of wearing baggy or oversized clothing also lends itself to shoplifting.
- Arrive very early or very late in the shopping day. Some shoplifters want to operate at a time when sales staff is distracted by normal beginning of day and end of day routines.
- Frequently visit restrooms or fitting rooms. They may be seeking privacy in isolated areas to take merchandise to conceal.
- 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.
- Are fussy and who keep interchanging articles frequently.
- Loiter or appear uninterested, or claim to be waiting for a friend.
- Pick up a lot of merchandise with no apparent attempt to purchase.

- Have an unusual gait or tug at sleeves, adjust socks, or keep rubbing the back of their necks.
- 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 item while the other one is worn under the shoplifter's own clothes.
- Hang around entrances or exits. They may be waiting for the chance to grab an arm full of merchandise and exit quickly.
- Keep the sales staff busy getting items from the back stockroom. They may be trying to remove the staff from the area to shoplift. If possible, have another staff member supervise the area while the first employee is gone.

Shoplifting Prevention Techniques

Prevention is the best approach in dealing with shoplifting and is the first avenue of deterrence.

- If the store is small, have a buzzer or bell that sounds when the front door is opened.
- Use mirrors to eliminate "blind spots" in corners that might hide shoplifters.
- Greet every customer you meet. Let customers know you are aware of their presence. The most effective deterrent to shoplifting is an alert and competent sales staff. Train your staff upon hire and provide an annual refresher course to review shoplifting prevention techniques and your store policy regarding shoplifters.
- Control backpacks and other parcels brought in by customers.
- Sales people should be able to personally monitor all areas accessible to customers. Mirrors and cameras can be used to extend the surveillance capability of the sales force. The use of CCTV with recording capability may help deter theft and strengthen any arrest made by providing a digital record of the offense.
- If possible, try elevating the cash register area to increase your field of vision and allow better monitoring of customers. Placing the register near the front of the store allows cashiers to help keep an eye on customers as they enter and exit the store. The cash register should be inaccessible to customers, locked and monitored always.
- Enforce a strict anti-shoplifting policy ("Shoplifters Will Be Prosecuted") and advertise your aggressive anti-shoplifting policy in plain view. Utilize the Lee's Summit Police Department's anti-shoplifting sticker on glass entry doors or windows.
- Sections of the store, such as cash registers, fitting rooms, exits, etc., should never be left unattended.
- If possible, have an employee in charge of the dressing room. Fitting rooms should be closely monitored for garments, hangers and tags, and should be kept clean between uses so evidence of theft can quickly indicate the possible thief. The number of garments allowed in the fitting room at one time should be limited and monitored.
- Watch persons wandering aimlessly up and down store aisles, fingering objects and frequently glancing at employees and other customers.
- Keep valuables 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. Limit the number of items you remove for customer inspection only to those you can adequately supervise at one time. Keep display cases locked at all times. Check to make sure the glass of the display cases cannot be lifted out.

- Use an electronic shoplifting deterrence system or Electronic Article Surveillance (EAS) system. Various electronic sensing devices are available to deter and detect shoplifting. A tag or embedded sensor with special electronic or magnetic characteristics is attached to an item. Special electronics are located at the exit of the store to detect tags which store personnel have not deactivated. If an EAS is used, each employee should receive extra training on how they work and the importance of properly removing them or deactivating them once an article is purchased. They can be expensive and time consuming to install and remove from the merchandise.
- Proper aisle layouts and low counters should maximize visibility to allow monitoring of the customers.
- If the items are sold in pairs, only display one part (i.e., left shoes only).
- Keep the store neat and orderly. Pattern displays and keep them filled so that you can tell in a glance if something is missing.
- Anchor all valuable display models to counters. Use cable tie-downs to restrict the movement of merchandise.
- Items inspected, but not sold, should be immediately returned to stock.
- Price marking equipment should not be left unattended.
- Items found on the wrong shelf may show that a shoplifter is in the store, and he or she disposed of the items thinking they were observed.
- Alert other employees immediately if you notice suspicious activities and call 911.
- 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 (a CD hidden inside a book). Large bulky items like trash containers, coolers, etc. should be inspected by the cashier for smaller items hidden inside.
- Each customer should receive a receipt for every purchase. This prevents the shoplifter from returning stolen items for a cash refund. Consider posting a store policy that states returns and exchanges will only be made with a receipt.
- Every bag should be stapled closed, with the sales 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. Cash registers should be positioned at the front of the store.
- Ask that a convicted shoplifter's court judgment or condition of probation include a prohibition on returning to your premises. Or, if a shoplifter is arrested on your property, ask the arresting police officer to provide the shoplifter with a "no trespass" warning, barring the defendant from your store indefinitely.

Apprehension and Arrest of the Shoplifter

Be thoroughly familiar with your state's law and current case law as it relates to the detection, apprehension, use of force and arresting of shoplifters. Know the boundaries of the shoplifting law in your local jurisdiction. Management should write policies and procedures for store employees to follow in dealing with the theft of company assets and they should thoroughly train all employees in their use. You should seek competent legal counsel as serious legal problems may result if you fail to abide by your current state law. Each store is responsible for developing their own policies as to how employees should handle shoplifting situations. Criminal law allows for any citizen to make a "citizen's arrest" when they see a crime occurring. However, store owners should consult legal counsel before writing a policy on shoplifting, as employer civil liability for customers and their employees may require a more restrictive approach.

Lee's Summit Police Department responds to all calls for service. However, State and local law requires store owners, operators, or representatives thereof to agree to prosecute shoplifters prior to officers making an arrest. For example, officers responding to a call of shoplifting will stop and hold the suspected shoplifter. If it is determined that the person stole merchandise from the store, the officer will ask the store representative if he or she wants to "press charges" against the suspect. If the representative answers "yes," the officer will then officially arrest the defendant and transport him or her to jail. If the representative answers "no," the officer can still provide a "no trespass" warning to the suspect, but a formal police report will not be taken. Typically, the act of shoplifting is deemed to have occurred if the suspect passes the last point of sale with merchandise he or she has failed to purchase. If a customer conceals merchandise on his or her person, police should be called immediately, even if the customer has not yet passed the last point of sale. Concealing merchandise is obviously a sign that the customer may try to leave the store without paying, especially if the customer has removed any of the store packaging from the concealed item. If you suspect a shoplifter in your store, notify the police immediately by calling 911, or call non-emergency Police Dispatch at (816) 969-7390.

For questions or comments regarding this Guide to Shoplifting Prevention, contact the Public Information Unit at (816) 969-1708. This Guide can be accessed online at www.cityofls.net/Police/Public-Information/Business-e-Watch.aspx.



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