



*To organize and support
community partnerships to prevent
crime and the fear of crime*

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Robbery Prevention for Businesses

Office of Neighborhood Involvement Crime Prevention Program
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Robbery is a face-to-face crime that occurs when an offender takes something of value by force or threat of force. A commercial robbery may take place immediately when the perpetrator enters the business and demands cash or merchandise. In other cases, the robber may act like a customer and commit the offense when approaching the counter. Although robberies can happen at any time, opening and closing times are especially vulnerable because there are fewer staff members and customers in the store and potentially more cash available. It is not uncommon for a location to be targeted multiple times even within weeks of an incident. There are crime prevention strategies that you can take to make your location less prone to robberies. However, a part of any safety plan should include training employees on how to respond if one should occur.

Responding to a robbery:

Robbery is a dangerous crime. The perpetrator is often nervous and focused on getting in and out of the location as quickly as possible. The best response is to fully comply and be a helpful witness for the police. All employees should be trained on the proper procedures for responding to a robbery and new hires should be trained immediately. If you are in a business that is a high robbery risk, trainings should be held regularly.

What you should do if faced with a robbery:

- Try to remain calm and fully comply with the robber's demands. Do not argue, fight, surprise or attempt to use weapons if you are held up. Property is always less important than the safety of staff.
- Take only those actions that are demanded, nothing more. Let him or her tell you what you should do. Any extra actions may cause alarm to the robber. Your movements should be predictable and transparent.
- Be a good witness and take note of the suspect's description. Areas to note include height, weight, race, hair and eye color, tattoos, unique features that cannot be easily changed, clothing and shoes. Also observe the make, model and unique features of the vehicle and the direction that the robber is heading. Consider adding markers on the business doors to gauge height and size.
- Don't bring attention to the robber during the act. This additional focus may place customers and workers in danger. It is important to mitigate risks and help the robber get out of the store as soon as possible.
- Activate a silent alarm only if you can discreetly do so.
- Call the police as soon as it is safe.
- Don't touch anything that the robber handled or disturb any evidence that may be used in the investigation.
- If there are other witnesses, ask them to stay at the scene until the

police arrive. If they insist on leaving, obtain their contact information.

Robbery is a traumatic event that may impact victims differently. Some employees may experience traumatic symptoms following this kind of violent crime and may need psychological assistance.

Making your location a less attractive target:

Maximize Visibility:

Open up sightlines to your property so that activities inside or outside of your store can be observed by employees and passersby. This will also make it easier for employees to witness suspicious activity and take appropriate action. If a neighbor walks or drives by and sees something happening in

your store, they are more likely to call the police. Criminals tend to choose locations where their activities cannot be observed and they are unlikely to be apprehended.

- **Cameras**—Use a camera surveillance system that captures clear images under all lighting conditions.

- » Install security cameras at entry points, over cash registers and parking lots at angles that reveal facial and other features of suspicious individuals as well as license plates and other details of vehicles.

- » Record video footage on a DVR, other storage device or the cloud and maintain one month of footage if possible. The footage should be stored in an office and/or locked up so that it cannot be easily accessed by the robber.



One of the main purposes of camera surveillance is to use footage for apprehension. Camera placement is key. In the left photo, the angle doesn't show facial features and won't be as helpful to the police as the photo on the right.

- » Make sure that all employees know how to access and retrieve footage for the police. Each employee should be trained on this process.

- » If you use video camera surveillance, visibly advertise this practice. Consider whether employees need to monitor activity including any blind spots in the store.

- » Mount a camera monitor on a visible location in the store, so that all customers know that their activity is being observed and recorded.

- **Lighting**—Make sure that exterior lighting around the perimeter of the building, parking lot and other areas of your business provides a soft, even light and eliminates dark shadows and hiding spots where criminals can “case” the store. Shielded lighting that directs the light to the area you are trying to observe increases light efficiency and reduces glare. If lights are set on timers, make sure that they are adjusted for longer hours of darkness during the winter months.

- **Vegetation**—Trim vegetation so that it does not block sightlines into and out of the store.

- **Signage**—Keep windows free of excessive signs and advertisements. Signage should not obstruct views in and out of the store.

- **Store layout**—Locate cashier counter and registers where the clerks will have maximum visibility over the entire store. Displays and shelving are ideally low enough that they don't block sightlines.

- **Wide-angle mirrors**—Place wide-angle or convex mirrors in areas where there are blind spots.

- **Store organization**—A clean and orderly store shows that employees are

vigilant. Stores with the appearance of disorder and uncleanliness are more likely to be targeted by robbers.

- Make sure that your address numbers are clearly visible during the day and night so that the police can easily find your location.

Control Access

Access control is a concept directed primarily at decreasing criminal accessibility, especially into areas where a person with criminal intent would not easily be seen by others.

- Install panic alarms. If your business is vulnerable to robberies or patrons who display erratic behavior, a panic button may be helpful. When the alarm is activated, most likely your monitoring company will be notified. Understand what happens when that alarm is activated and the response protocol. Please note that the monitoring company likely cannot verify what's happening. If they call the police, they may only be able to state that the panic alarm was activated and cannot confirm that a robbery is in progress. Therefore, as soon as it safe to do so, call 9-1-1. The panic alarm should be used in addition to calling 9-1-1.



- Install a door signaling system such as a buzzer/bell. This will alert staff that there is a visitor, so that no one is caught off guard.

- Lock doors not in use. Lock office doors, fitting rooms and entrances to other areas not in use in compliance with fire code safety. You do not want an offender to be able to hide in the store.

This convenience store has minimal signage so views are not obscured. The design of the interior allows the clerk to see all activities inside the store and in the parking lot.

Also keep back and side doors locked. Employees should enter and exit through the front door.

- Post signs to restricted areas. For example, "Private" or "Employees Only." This way it is obvious when people are in violation of store rules.
- Cut off possible escape routes. This step is meant to deter a robber from preselecting your business. If your business allows for an easy escape route to an alley or other area that makes apprehension difficult, install fencing or landscaping to block easy access to alleys or pathways.
- Secure tablet registers to the counter.
- Increase security measures for robbery prone businesses. For some businesses that handle high volumes of cash or a frequently stolen product, more security measures may be necessary such as a bullet resistant safety enclosure for pharmacies.

Alter store protocols and procedures to reduce risks:

There are a number of management practices that can help reduce the risk of robbery. Some significant steps you can take for your business:

- Establish cash handling policies:
 - » Adopt cash control policies limiting the amount of cash kept in tills or other accessible places. All excess cash should be dropped in the safe or deposited.
 - » Install a time-release drop safe to minimize the amount of cash on hand.
 - » Don't count money in front of customers.
 - » Make bank deposits throughout the day, but choose random times and

Examples of security practices that you can advertise in your businesses:



- alter your route to the bank. You don't want to establish a predictable pattern. If you handle high volumes of cash, consider employing an armed guard service. Carry your money in a discreet bag to and from the bank, so that it's not obvious what you are transporting.
- » Limit knowledge of certain cash procedures to owners and managers. This includes the drop times, routes taken and which bank is used.
- Advertise security policies. Many stores advertise that they keep minimal cash on hand and cannot access the store safes.
- Staff shifts adequately. There should be at least two workers on duty after dark. All staff should be trained on how to respond to a robbery. Opening and closing times are especially vulnerable. Caution should be used when taking out the trash and leaving and entering the premises. Establish safety guidelines for employees.
- Report suspicious activity. Report and have a policy for responding to suspicious activity:
 - » If you observe someone acting suspiciously, call the police at 9-1-1 for immediate threats to life or property. Otherwise you can call the police non-emergency number at 503-823-3333.
 - » If you see something that concerns you in the parking lot, there should be a protocol in place to the lock the door.
- Employ active customer service. Politely ask people in your store if you can help them find an item. Robbers do not want to be identified and being approached by store staff will deter or discourage potential robbers.
- Create Distress Codes. Distress codes communicate that you need assistance and should be discreet phrases that would not be obvious to the person you are concerned about. You may create one for employee communication. One code may mean "I need assistance" while another may alert the employee to "call the police immediately". You may have an agreement with neighboring stores that you can call them when you need help and use an inter-business code.
- Limit the amount of inventory on hand for items tending to be robbed and lock them up. For example a pharmacy may limit its supply of pain medication on hand to reduce losses and keep them in time-delay safes.
- Background check employees. Background information helps you make an informed decision about who you are hiring.
- Rekey locks, cancel fobs and change alarm and safe codes when an employee is terminated.
- Discourage loitering through effective lighting and design of the exterior space.
- Develop relationships with businesses and neighbors near your store. When you know your neighbors, they're more likely to look out for you and call the police if they see criminal or suspicious activity.
- Please see our Crime Prevention through Environmental Design brochures for ways to further secure your business: portlandoregon.gov/cpadvice.

If your Portland business would like some guidance about improving the security of your establishment, contact the City of Portland's Crime Prevention Program.

City of Portland's Crime Prevention Program

Ask for the Crime Prevention Program Coordinator for your Portland Neighborhood at 503-823-4064 or onicpa@portlandoregon.gov.
Our website: www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/cp