

Portland Police Bureau

A Guide to Robbery Prevention and Response to Robbery



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Portland Police Bureau

Robbery Prevention

Robbery is a crime against your person rather than against your property. If someone breaks into your home or business and takes property from the premises, the crime is called a burglary. However, if you are confronted by an individual on the street or in your home, car or business and force is used or threatened against you, you have become the victim of a robbery.

It is important to remember two things:

- **Robbers want one thing – your money or property – and they want it quickly.**
- **Robbery is a risky business and robbers are usually nervous. You do not want to delay a robbery in any way and increase the potential for violence. Give the robber what he or she wants and do it quickly. Do not risk your life, or another person's life, for property.**

Be Alert

- **Robberies occur at predictable times.** Opening and closing periods are particularly vulnerable times due to low staffing and large amounts of cash on hand. Lunch hours are primary times for the same reasons. Robberies increase during the holiday season due to the increased cash volume and the presence of large crowds that distract and preoccupy store and company personnel.
- **Report suspicions activity.** If you observe an individual, or occupied vehicle, lingering around your business for a time, or in a manner that makes you suspicious or uncomfortable, write down the license number, color of the car and description of the individual(s) and call the police non-emergency number (503-823-3333). Be sure to inform other employees of your suspicion.

Visibility

- **Good visibility allows employees to be aware of suspicious activities outside the store.** It also increases the chance passerbys will observe robberies taking place inside the store.
- **Keep doors and windows clear.** Post any necessary signs to the side, top or bottom of the display windows to allow maximum visibility into and out of the store. This will help customers see your merchandise too.
- **Locate the cash register in a central place.** Keep it in clear view of the door, with the customer's back to the entrance. The register should be visible from the outside.
- **Keep counter displays low.** This allows employees to see over the top. You can also rearrange displays to allow surveillance up and down both sides of each aisle.
- **Place wide-angle mirrors in strategic locations.** This will assist with visibility in blind areas of the store.
- **Make sure interior lighting provide good visibility in the store at all times.** Outdoor lighting should be even and directed toward the sides of the building, not outward where glare can create hiding places for robbers.

Cash Control

- **Do not keep unnecessary amounts of money in the till.** Keep only the amount you will need to conduct normal business, and transfer the rest to the bank or a safe. Provide an anchored drop-vault for employees and do not provide them with the key to the safe. Post the fact that you use a drop-vault and, therefore, cannot make change for large denominations.
- **Drop all checks and food stamps.** Allow customers to see you do this and explain why. Ask customers for exact change or the smallest bills possible.
- **During the evening, take even greater precautions.** Check to see that outside lights are on and working. In money order sales, collect money and make your drop before printing the money order. Open unused register drawers and tip them for display.
- **Make trips to the bank often, varying travel times and routes to reduce predictability.** Carry money in a disguised container and have someone accompany you when possible. Do not transport money at the same time every day and do not use the same route every time. If you are making a night deposit, do not approach the deposit unless it is clear of other people. For high risk areas, or when transferring considerable amounts of cash, consider employing an armored car service.
- **List some serial numbers from larger bills before going to the bank.** Be aware of any suspicious persons lingering near the store. Call 9-1-1 if necessary.
- **Drive or walk directly to an open business, police precinct or fire station, if you feel you are being followed while transporting money.**
- **Prepare marked money.** Record non-consecutive serial numbers and series dates of five and ten-dollar bills. Do not use these bills in normal transactions; rather place the money in a till to be included in the money given to the robber. Keep the record of the marked bills in a secure location other than the till or the safe.
- **Post store policy that no more than some pre-determined amount (often \$25 to \$50) is kept in the register at one time and that the store will accept no larger than \$20 denominations.** When the clerk receives the \$20 bill it should be dropped immediately. Never place large bills in the drawer under the tray. Robbers know this practice.

Building Security and Security Devices

- **Control access to the building.** Keep all doors locked except the main entrance. Ask employees to use the main entrance.
- **Install a lock on the back room door that can be unlocked from the inside.** Supply this room with an extra key, a phone and a panic button. This will enable an employee to summon help if locked in during a robbery.
- **Create a sense of territoriality.** People should feel they are on your turf when they enter the store and not free to do as they wish.
- **Install a door signaling system like a buzzer/bell.** This will alert staff of new arrivals.
- **Use signs inside and outside the store to emphasize your security policy on limited cash on hand and employee inaccessibility to the safe.**

- **Silent “hold-up” alarms should be considered.** Alarm signaling devices can be installed on the floor and tripped by foot, wired to a money clip in the till, hidden under the counter or inside an office or freezer, among other possibilities.
- **Install a “buddy alarm” system.** A simple bell or buzzer connected to the neighboring business can be an effective and inexpensive “panic” alarm. It should not be hooked to lights, for a flicker could warn the robber that an alarm has been sent. It should not be loud enough to be heard by the robber. The alarm should be activated only if there is no possibility of detection. A slight movement or sound could trigger a panicking robber into violence.

Identification

- **Greet each customer.** Establish eye contact and remember their general appearance. Good customer service discourages hesitant robbers as well as other thieves. This attention to detail conveys control and puts people on notice they have been observed and can be identified later.
- **Place height markings along the vertical frame at the entrance.** This allows employees the ability to tell how tall the robber is at a glance so employees can tell at a glance how tall the robber is.
- **Consider installing a quality video camera and recorder kept high on the wall but visible.** Don’t use fake cameras. Robbers know the difference. Have several cameras connected to the system, some visible, some not. Only the managers should have access to the tape.

Policy Considerations

- **Recognize your potential of being held up.** Work closely with the Police Bureau and Office of Neighborhood Involvement’s Crime Prevention Program at 503-823-4519 to get a perspective on the robbery threat for your business and location. Preventive strategies are as much their concern and responsibility as apprehension of criminals.
- **Check references of prospective employees.** Do a background check of previous employers. Additionally, consider contacting the Police Bureau to have a job applicant’s criminal history examined. For a criminal history background check, write to: Portland Police Bureau, Records Division, 1111 SW 2nd Ave., Room 1126, Portland, OR 97204. Please note that by law, the Bureau cannot disclose what a particular crime was. Also, a criminal history check through the Portland Police Bureau will not include anything outside the City of Portland. There is a \$5.00 fee for each background check. The request must be on business letterhead. You can also contact the State Bureau of Identification (503) 378-3070 for a more thorough criminal history background check.
- **Keep a file on all employees, including their pictures.** Past employees know store procedure and where money is kept. They sometimes share this information with others who use it to plan robberies at the store. Pictures of suspects are much more useful than verbal descriptions.
- **Re-key locks and alter safe combinations or codes when employees are dismissed for cause.**

- **Establish clear and consistent policies regarding money in the till.** Establish how much money will be kept in the till, what bill denominations employees will accept, how to respond to “suspicious” inquires and how to handle loiterers. All employees should be trained and given a written description of store policy. Stress that their commitment to security procedures will reduce their risk of criminal confrontation and physical harm.
- **Staff should never admit customers to premises after closing hours, particularly when the employee is alone.**
- **Always maintain adequate staff levels.** Be especially careful during opening and closing periods, lunch hours and holiday seasons when there is more money on the site and more distractions.
- **Store clerks should remain alert to what is going on outside their shop.** Carefully observe phone booths, parked cars with people inside and loiterers in the vicinity. Many robbers like to watch and wait for the right opportunity. If a parked car containing several people has been noticed on many occasions, get the license number and a general description of the occupants. Notify the police. A discreet investigation can be made and no one embarrassed in case the situation is an innocent one. Be sure to notify the individual(s) following your shift of suspicious circumstances.

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When to Call Emergency and Non-Emergency Numbers

It is important to know how to identify and report crimes and suspicious activity.

The following are guidelines for deciding whether an incident is an emergency or non-emergency, and if it should be reported to emergency (9-1-1) or non-emergency (503-823-3333). (Note: Multnomah County is the only county in the metropolitan area that has a non-emergency number. Clackamas, Clark and Washington counties call 9-1-1 for emergency and non-emergency situations.)

Call emergency 9-1-1 when:

- A crime is in progress
- A situation is about to escalate into an emergency (endangering life or major property)
- A crime has just occurred (especially if you can describe the suspect and the direction in which he or she fled)

Call the non-emergency number (503-823-3333) when:

- Your business was burglarized last night
- Your business car was broken into last night
- You need to add additional information to a report you made last week
- Your business received a bad check last Tuesday

The non-emergency number can be accessed 24-hours a day for non-emergency police help. Using the non-emergency number keeps 9-1-1 available for true emergencies. When dialing the non-emergency number you will go into a voicemail system. By selecting the correct options you will be able to speak to an operator.

Some suspicious activity may not be obvious, and what is considered suspicious activity in one building may be common in another. Keep in mind that behavior or activity that is not normal for your building could be an indication that a crime is about to happen. It is important that tenants are familiar with their neighbors so when asking strangers if they need assistance they will be able to evaluate the answer.

Watch for people wandering around aimlessly, trying to open closed doors, loitering in restrooms, and selling or pretending to sell something. Someone wandering around the common areas of your floor or building might be a client of another tenant, but they could also be someone “casing” the floor or building for hiding places or under-monitored offices.

Tell solicitors that soliciting is against the building management’s or your company’s policy. If you are really suspicious of someone who is soliciting, ask for the salesperson’s supervisor’s phone number and call to ask that the employee be verified and/or told to leave the building.

Using the non-emergency number keeps 9-1-1 available for true emergencies.

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Guidelines for “Challenging” Strangers

Having policies and procedures in place for the whole building, as well as each individual organization helps tenants take responsibility for challenging strangers in their workplace. A company policy to have guests check-in with the receptionist and a policy to escort guests to their destination will make unescorted individuals stick out. All employees should be prepared to approach people who are not connected to the company or building and escort them to their destination. If this is standard policy supported by managers, employees will feel more comfortable in approaching and assisting unfamiliar people.

When you “challenge” a stranger, you do not have to be rude or threatening. Remember to be polite but assertive. The best thing to do is to ask the person, “can I help you find someone?”

If the person seems calm, and answers you directly with a name or destination you recognize, you might offer to escort the person, or call their destination and have someone come accompany the person to the appropriate office. A legitimate client will appreciate the assistance, while the potential thief will probably look for an easier target.

If you approach a stranger, asking if they need assistance, and the stranger says he or she does not remember the person’s name or company name, or gives vague or partial answers like, “the guy in accounting” or “Jennifer something” encourage him or her to return to the lobby and consult the directory or return to the receptionist for assistance. You could also tell the person that you are calling security to assist him or her in finding the appropriate office or person. This will let the individual know that wandering around is not acceptable and that help is available if he or she needs it.

We strongly encourage you to not allow anyone to wander around your area, floor, or building unescorted, especially if their answers do not seem legitimate.

The best thing to do is to ask the person, “Can I help you find someone?”

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Office Building Security

Be Alert

Pay attention to who is in your work area and know who belongs in your work area. Become familiar with the faces of people who belong in your building. Pay attention to people who behave suspiciously, i.e. someone who loiters in the area with no apparent purpose. Be particularly aware of a person you have seen loitering more than once.

Establish a Security Committee

A security committee can provide insight into areas in your office that are a potential security risk. They can function as a policy recommendation body, looking into what policies should be established or changed in order to maximize the safety of everyone in the office. The security committee should periodically pass on crime prevention tips to fellow employees through memos, bulletin boards, and/or newsletters. The committee should meet only as needed to review the status of recommendations and provide recommendations regarding any new safety concerns.

Question Strangers

Make a habit of politely asking strangers if you may help them find someone or something. This technique can allow you to determine the individual's reason for being in the area and will often deter or discourage potential criminals. Most criminals are opportunists. If the opportunity is not there, or is too difficult, they will move on. They do not want to be spotted, especially by alert people who will report and identify them. A polite offer of assistance will not offend customers, clients or others with a legitimate reason to be on the premises. It will put the individual looking to steal on notice that he or she has been seen and could be recognized or described.

Watch for the Con Artist/Petty Thief

Keep purses, coats and other valuables safely locked in a storage area or desk. Most thieves know you keep your purse in the bottom drawer or under your desk or that your wallet is in your inner jacket pocket. If no secure place for valuables exists, and none can be created, remove money, credit cards, and other valuable items from purses and coats and keep them on your person. Reduce the amount of cash you carry and don't discuss how much money you are carrying – someone may listen. Don't leave keys lying out in the open.

Design Considerations

- **Use gates and counters to separate clients from employees when appropriate.** These devices can prevent the potential thief from gaining access to areas where cash or checks are kept or employees store personal belongings. These physical barriers aid in defining public spaces for general use.

- **Post signs to designate restricted areas.** For example: “Private” or “Employees Only”.
- **Install an information desk and staff it during business hours.** It should be in a prominent location to assist customers and provide some surveillance of the main entrance or entrances of the floor or building.
- **Create transition zones.** These can be steps up or down, screened or partitioned off areas, different levels of lighting or carpeting in a given space. These methods subtly indicate a change in usage from public to private.
- **Provide adequate staff.** The most vulnerable time for office thefts are early morning, lunch hours, and near or after closing time, especially on Fridays or holidays. It is important to have enough personnel to provide proper surveillance. Adequate staffing levels also ensure that clients receive timely assistance and service.
- **Report any broken or flickering lights,** dimly lit corridors, doors that don’t lock properly, broken windows, or broken pay phones to building management or security immediately. Not attending to these items can create an environment conducive to crime. The faster they are repaired the safer the environment feels.

Office Security Procedures

Develop company security procedures. The procedures should state the company’s policy and dedication to a crime-free workplace. Including procedures for the following will help empower employees to make their workspace safe and crime-free:

- Dealing with trespassers and/or difficult people
- Opening and closing the office
- Using the office during off hours
- Recommendations for personal and personal property security
- Who to report crimes and suspicious activities to within the office
- Emergency exit plan

Become familiar with the faces of people who belong in your building.

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Office Security Survey

There is no way to completely “burglarproof” your office. However, you can make your office less appealing for opportunity-seeking burglars by improving security. Ideally, you will be able to answer “yes” to all these questions.

Lighting and signs

- Are common areas (halls, elevators, lobbies, and stairways) well lit?
- Are “employee only” areas clearly marked and/or closed off from the public?

Doors and windows

- Are exterior doors secured using a deadbolt lock, with a minimum one-inch throw?
- Are sliding doors and windows secured against forced locks and/or lifting out their frames?
- Are all fire exits securely locked from the inside?
- Do employees secure office, building and fire exits behind them?
- Are double-hung windows and doors secured with a pin or extra lock to discourage jimmying?

Employees

- Does each employee have access to a secure place to store personal belongings (such as coats, purses, and gym bags, etc.)?
- Does your company publicly thank employees who report problems that might contribute to crime?
- Are phone numbers to report crime emergencies and suspicious activity posted throughout the office and distributed to all employees?
- Are emergency numbers for building management and security posted throughout the office?
- If something suspicious or threatening happened – a stranger loitering near the door, a burglary, a telephone threat – do staff know the telephone numbers for the security, police and fire departments?
- Is there a staffed reception desk or information desk at the entrance of your office?
- Does all staff know which areas are restricted access only areas?
- Does staff insist on identification from repairpersons who come to work in the office? Is staff alert while they are in the office?
- Does all staff know what a normal day’s business activities are?
- Does someone keep track of all keys distributed? Does staff immediately report lost or stolen keys to security or building management?
- Is all valuable office equipment marked with the firm’s Oregon Employer Tax Firm number?
- Does the firm keep a current list of property serial numbers and descriptions?
- Are employees familiar with other companies on the floor or in the building? Does your firm have a list of contacts for companies on your floor and/or other floors.
- If your company has a security committee, does it periodically pass on crime prevention tips to the rest of the firm through memos, a bulletin board or newsletter?
- Do all employees notify security when they are working late or coming in early?

Now, implement changes to correct any “no” answers.

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Key Control

Without a system ensuring the proper distribution, use and return of office keys, companies increase their risk of losing property through internal theft and burglary. Use the suggestions listed below as guidelines for establishing your own key control plan.

- Assign a trusted employee to be responsible for overseeing key control policies including issuance, use, duplication and return.
- Systematically store all unassigned keys in a sturdy locked cabinet. Keep a record showing the issuance and return of every key, including name of user, date and time so that it is immediately apparent who has a key to any given lock.
- Restrict office keys to those who actually need them.
- Devise a coding system for each lock and its key that will not be obvious to someone finding the key. Keys should be stamped with this code.
- Alarm keys should be separately marked and coded. Limit their use to the fewest people possible.
- Periodic inspections should be made to assure employees possess the keys they are assigned and that none are lost.
- Insist that keys not be left unguarded. Remove filing cabinet keys from their locks after opening cabinets and place them in a secure location.
- Restrict duplication of office keys except those specifically ordered by management in writing. Consider dismissal for unauthorized duplication.
- Require all keys to be marked "Do not duplicate" to prevent legitimate locksmiths from making copies without authorization.
- Maintain a strict policy of collecting keys from terminated employees.
- Change the key cylinder of all locks affected when employees are discharged for cause or when departing employees do not immediately surrender keys.
- Written policy should mandate the immediate reporting for all lost or stolen keys. If a key is lost or stolen, its lock should immediately be replaced or re-keyed.

Assign a trusted employee to be responsible for overseeing key control policies.

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Response to Robbery

During the Robbery

- **Remain calm.** Most robbers do not wish to harm their victims. They are only interested in getting money or property. The calmer you are, the less chance there is of the robber becoming agitated or dangerous. This also increases your chances of getting a more accurate description of the robber and being of greater assistance in the robber's apprehension.
- **Do not argue, fight, surprise or attempt to use weapons against a robber.** He has already taken a major risk by entering your store and is usually as frightened as you are. Because of this, additional provocation on your part could make the situation worse. Therefore, give the robber exactly what he or she wants and do it quickly. Don't take unnecessary chances with your life.
- **While you should cooperate with robbers, don't volunteer any assistance.** Don't give all the money if the robber only asks for \$10's. Don't give checks voluntarily.
- **Activate silent alarms or other security devices if you can do this without detection.**
- **Watch the robber's hands.** If the robber is not wearing any gloves, anything he touches might leave good fingerprints.
- **Give the robber your "bait" money.** Be sure to inform the investigating officer that you did so.
- **Be systematic in your observations.** Look the robber over carefully. Mentally note as many details as possible until you can write them down. Compare the robber with yourself. Is he taller, heavier, older...and so on.
- **Notice the type and description of any weapons used.** Glance at the weapon only long enough to identify it. Look at the robber from then on. Make no sudden moves and don't be heroic.
- **If it can be done safely, observe the direction the thief takes in leaving the scene.** Where a vehicle is involved, concentrate on the make, model, year, color, license plate number and issuing state.

After the Robbery

- **Telephone police immediately.** If you act quickly, police might be able to catch the suspect and recover your money. When you dial 9-1-1, the procedure is always the same. You will be asked if your emergency involves police, fire or medical. Request police. Then briefly indicate to the call taker what the problem is, when it happened, where you are, who did it, who needs help and whether there were injuries or weapons involved. Remember to stay on the phone with the emergency call taker. After calling the police, keep your telephone line clear until the police arrive. The officers may need to call you.
- **Lock all doors and allow no one in.** Ask witnesses to remain on the premises until police arrive. Do not touch anything the robber may have touched.

- **Do not discuss what happened with any other witnesses.** Your own impressions should be kept untainted until you have talked with authorities.
- **Complete your incident-suspect-vehicle description form while waiting for police to arrive.** The responding officer will want this information immediately to broadcast to other police cars in the area. Be as complete as possible. Consider keeping a portable tape recorder nearby to preserve your first impressions. Sometimes you will be trembling too much to write quickly or may feel more comfortable verbalizing the episode than writing about it.
- **Finally, remember that robbery response strategies require planning and coordination between employees and management.** Give some thought to how you might react in a robbery situation and discuss your concerns with co-workers and employers. Common sense, caution and adherence to established policies and procedures can reduce the amount of money stolen and minimize the chance for injury and loss of life.

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