



An Garda Síochána

Crime Prevention Information Sheet

Preventing Customer Theft

Making it difficult for the customer or the professional shoplifter to take goods can greatly reduce this problem.

Common methods of shoplifting include:

Palming:

Stealing small items and concealing them in the palm of the hand.

Switching Prices:

Putting price tags from low cost goods onto more expensive goods.

Steaming:

A large gang enters a shop, intimidates, threatens or distracts staff in order to steal large quantities of goods before running off. It can be dangerous to tackle these people, as they are likely to resort to violence.

Staff Collusion:

Staff working in conjunction with the thieves by turning a blind eye to theft or colluding in the crime.

Other methods can be the use of belts, special pockets in the inside lining of coats, wearing baggy clothes, briefcases, shopping bags, prams, and children's buggies for concealment purposes.

The professional shoplifter will try to overcome electronic security devices by removing tags in changing rooms, by stealing a de-tagger from the shop or using foil-lined bags.

Attentive staff are the best asset in shoplifting prevention. Staff should be encouraged to be observant, and made conscious of the risk of customer theft. Too often this is left to security staff alone. Well-trained, alert staff can prevent a large proportion of theft.

Staff should be trained to recognise thieves, as the thief will always be watching staff or looking around the shop rather than at the products.

They should know what to do if they see a customer acting suspiciously; making a customer aware that he/she has been noticed will often be sufficient.

Staff should use normal sales approach such as "Can I help you?" or make themselves busy near a suspect.

If a theft has already occurred, staff should keep the suspect under observation and alert other staff, security and call the Gardaí.

CCTV cameras will deter some thieves and can help to prosecute the more daring ones. The cameras should be highly visible with warning signs on display. A camera should monitor the entrances to the shop to record thieves entering. Recordings may become evidence and must be kept under lock and key in an appropriate cabinet.

The groups of criminals engaging in this type of crime can be categorised as follows:

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS OR OTHER CRIME PREVENTION ISSUES,
PLEASE CONTACT
your local GARDÁ CRIME PREVENTION OFFICER
or
visit the Garda website at www.garda.ie**

Opportunist:

Not a regular thief, but if the goods are left unattended or concealed from staff he/she will take them. This type of thief comes from all walks of life.

Persistent:

Many thieves steal regularly, every day or every week. They mix genuine purchases with some stolen goods, and can be some of the oldest or most trusted customers. No one should be taken for granted.

Juveniles:

They usually engage in theft when they are in a group or as a result of peer pressure. They tend to steal items such as electronic games, CDs, fashion goods, or sweets.

Drug Abusers:

They may consider theft from shops as an easy or safe way to raise money to support their habit. A drug habit can be very expensive and therefore the drug abuser tends to concentrate on high value goods.

Professional:

Thieves target high value goods and often steal a large number of goods, e.g. an entire rack of clothes. They nearly always work as a team passing goods through several pairs of hands very quickly. Some gangs use minders to protect them, or if they are well-known they will wear disguise.

Dealing with a Shoplifter

When a staff member or a member of security detects a case of shoplifting they should act as follows:

The suspect should be kept in sight at all times.

The staff member should be absolutely sure that a theft has taken place and that the suspect has the item stolen in their possession.

It may be necessary to allow the suspect leave the shop to confirm that a theft has taken place. The suspect should not be approached until the final cash point has been passed and is heading for the exit door.

At this stage, the suspect should be approached, asked if they have forgotten to pay for the item subject of the suspected theft and asked to come back into the shop to an interview room away from the view of other customers or staff.

If possible two staff members should be involved in the process at this stage. The suspect should be given an opportunity to explain and produce the items involved. The staff member has no power of search and should call the Gardaí at this time.

The staff member should record details of the incident, and the date and time in their notebook. When the Gardaí arrive at the scene they will then take charge and may arrest the offender if an offence is disclosed.

All retailers should have a policy of prosecuting all identified shoplifters. It is one of the only deterrents available to them.

The law in relation to shoplifting is contained in:

- Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act, 2001
- Criminal Law Act of 1997 - "Arrestable Offence"
- Criminal Justice Act, 2006, and
- Criminal Justice Act, 2007

These Acts can be viewed on the Acts of the Oireachtas website - www.acts.ie

Useful Contacts and Links

**The Garda National Crime Prevention Unit,
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