

ROBBERY

AND VIOLENCE IN THE RETAIL INDUSTRY



Photo: Mike Combe, NSW Police Public Affairs Branch

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Introduction

Retailers have a high risk of being involved in a robbery or violent incident. Criminals are always looking for ways to beat crime prevention systems and will often risk being caught for a small amount of cash.

By remembering one simple rule you can lower your chances of being robbed or involved in a violent incident. That is:

“The higher the risk of being caught, the lower the likelihood of the offence being committed”

In the following pages you will read about a number of strategies that will help you to reduce your chances of being the target of violent criminals. These strategies will also increase employee and customer safety and serve as an easy-to-read guide for you to use in the future.

Who should read this information?

This information package has been designed for everyone working in the retail industry. It contains valuable safety information for employers and employees.

Why has this document been prepared?

Offenders are frequently targeting small retail businesses such as service stations, chemists, liquor stores, newsagents, fast food outlets, video shops and department stores.

This document has been prepared to help you make your workplace safer and to alert you to the hidden costs of robbery.

What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence is any violent act that occurs in the workplace and creates a hostile work environment that affects employees' physical or psychological well being. Such incidents can have a significant impact on the health, safety and welfare of employers, employees and customers.

Violence at work can take place in many ways including verbal and physical abuse, harassment, intimidation, threats, theft, stalking, assault, arson, taking hostages and homicide. Violence at work can occur between employees, employees & employers and customers & employees/employers.

This document will concentrate on robbery and violence between customers and employees and/or employers.

Robbery and violent incidents are different in the following ways:

- A robbery can be defined as *“theft from a person aggravated by violence or intimidation”*. In other words it means that the person is stealing something from someone or some place by using force or threatening to use force.
- A violent incident is when a customer or other person approaches an employer or an employee in a violent way. In these instances the person may not steal anything. However, they will still threaten or abuse the employer and/or employees.

How can I prevent a robbery or violent incident?

There are no guarantees when it comes to preventing a robbery or a violent incident. However there are a number of different factors that will help to reduce the likelihood of a robbery or violent incident occurring and to reduce the risk of injury if an incident occurs. These factors include:

1. Being committed
2. Being prepared
3. Training & Supervision
4. Monitoring & Review
5. Surviving a robbery or violent incident
6. What to do after a robbery or violent incident

1. Being Committed

Employer's responsibilities

Under Occupational Health and Safety legislation, employers have a duty of care to provide a workplace that is safe and without risk to health. This duty of care extends to taking all reasonable steps to minimise the likelihood of robberies and incidents of violence and any trauma that results from an incident or robbery.

Being committed is the first step towards reducing the risk of a robbery or a violent incident.

Being committed means:

- Assessing the risks in the workplace – look around your shop and identify anything that may present a risk to you or your staff. These might include gaps in security, the location of the cash register, not being able to see the front door etc
- Consulting your employees – ask your staff if they have any ideas on how to make their workplace safer
- Investing time and money in the short term to reduce the potential costs in the long term

Employee's responsibilities

Employees have a responsibility to take care of others and to cooperate with their employer with regard to health, safety and welfare requirements.

The hidden costs of a robbery or violent incident

Often retailers do not introduce safer practices or install proper security devices because they believe that it is too expensive. However, when making these decisions retailers forget to assess the hidden costs of a robbery or violent incident.

These costs include:

Lost money

The most obvious costs of a robbery are the goods or money that may be stolen. Your shop may also be damaged during the incident. Both of these factors can affect your bottom line.

Staffing costs

If an employee has been physically injured or emotionally traumatised as a result of an incident they are unlikely to return to work straight away. They may also require counselling or medical treatment.

You may have to spend money by calling in extra staff or you may lose money by not having enough staff.

Increased Workers Compensation costs

As an employer you may have to pay higher Workers Compensation Premiums if an employee is injured physically or emotionally and makes a claim. Workers Compensation costs may include counselling, medical treatment and psychological injury.

Increased insurance premiums

Your insurance costs may increase if you are robbed on a regular basis whereas you may receive a discount on your insurance premiums if you have security measures in place.

Keeping Staff

Staff may fear for their safety after a robbery or violent incident and will be less likely to stay in the job. A high turnover of staff can cost a lot of money.

Loss of customers

You may lose some of your customers. They may be reluctant to visit your store if it is clear that there is little security in place or they may be in danger.

2. Being Prepared

There are a number of ways to reduce the risk of robberies and workplace violence. The methods available fall into three categories:

- (a) Safer working practices
- (b) Physical options
- (c) Electronic security

(a) Safer Working Practices

- Be alert – keep an eye on people in the shop
- Make sure you have safety, security and emergency procedures
- Train your staff and make sure they know and follow safety procedures
- Minimise cash – only keep a small amount of money in the cash register
- Bank regularly – keep a minimum amount of money on the premises
- Restrict access to cash handling areas
- Keep the back door locked (but make sure you have an emergency exit)
- Keep safes and drop boxes locked, don't leave the keys in sight
- Have your cash collected or do your banking at different times of the day
- Keep doors locked before and after business hours and, if possible, when counting cash
- Don't tell people how much cash you keep on the premises

(b) Physical options

- Position the cash handling areas away from entries and exits
- Separate the cash handling area from the general workplace
- Make sure staff can see in and out of the store (remove posters from windows)
- Mirrors can be used to help staff see the whole shop, however, make sure that the mirrors do not allow potential offenders to see the cash area
- Lighting can make the target highly visible and increase the chances of offender identification
- Remove signs that may block your vision of the store
- Install counters with an elevated place for the cash register
- Have anti jump barriers fitted in front of cash handling devices
- Have a mini safe/drop box, strongroom or other safety box fitted and make sure it's out of public sight
- Bullet resistant barriers or ascending ballistic screens can be fitted to the cash handling areas
- Block all alternative accesses to building (without blocking off a fire exit)
- Have time delay locks fitted to all compartments and counter safes
- Use security guards or other security guarding devices
- Display 'emergency numbers' in a prominent position for staff
- Make sure you have a first aid kit available to all staff
- Place a coloured height chart next to the entrance of the store

(c) Electronic Security

- Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)
- Digital Camera Surveillance and Recording
- Still 35mm cameras mounted in predominant positions
- Hold-up alarms fitted in all workplaces, centrally monitored and silent in operation
- 24 hour perimeter alarm system
- Camera and alarm activation points in frequently used positions
- Note clip activators
- Roof cavity protection
- Mobile and fixed duress alarms
- Cash dye bombs
- Door alarms – to alert staff that someone is entering the premises

3. Training & Supervision

Training

All of your staff must receive training on health and safety procedures. It is also important to train your staff on how to behave during and after a robbery or a violent incident. Providing training on what to expect and how to act during and after a violent incident or robbery can significantly reduce the effects of post-traumatic stress.

Exactly what you include in your training program will depend on the types of safety procedures and equipment that you have. However the following ideas may help you know what to tell your staff.

What to include in a training program:

- How to be alert and identify possible suspicious behaviour
- Cash handling procedures
- Emergency procedures
- How to make sure staff vision is not blocked
- What to do during an incident
- What to do after an incident, including who to contact
- How to use security devices
- Confidentiality – not telling anybody about how much money is kept on the premises etc

New staff should be trained prior to commencing duty. Existing staff should be given training straight away if they have not yet received it. Refresher training should be provided regularly or when there are changes to procedures.

Supervision

Proper supervision is a very important part of ensuring the health and safety of employees. The level of supervision provided should be based on the experience, age and capability of the employee. For example, a young unsupervised worker may be at a higher risk of being targeted by an offender.

4. Monitoring & Review

It is important to monitor and review your security devices and safety procedures regularly. This should occur because the workplace can change and the devices can become ineffective.

Once you have provided training to your staff you should make sure they are following the safety procedures and know how to use any security devices that you have provided.

To make sure that your strategies work well you should review the security on:

- a regular basis, at least annually
- after an incident has occurred
- if the workplace is relocated, refurbished or renovated

5. Surviving a robbery or violent incident

SURVIVAL is the number one priority during a robbery or violent incident.

Everyone in the retail industry should follow a number of simple rules to reduce the likelihood of injury if an incident occurs.

SURVIVAL

RULES FOR A ROBBERY OR VIOLENT INCIDENT

- 1. Follow instructions:** Do exactly what the offender says
- 2. Stay calm and quiet**
- 3. Avoid eye contact**
- 4. Do not make a sudden movement**
- 5. Remain inside the workplace:** Do not chase the offender
- 6. Show your Hands:** If you have to move, keep your hands where the offender can see them and tell them what you are going to do
- 7. Do not attack the offender**
- 8. Mental notes:** Note as much information about the offender as possible, if it is safe to do so. Look at things like height, hair colour, eyes, physical condition and tattoos/special marks

6. What to do after a robbery or violent incident

After a robbery or a violent incident, employers and the person in charge at the time of the incident should follow a number of steps to help them deal with the situation.

After the robbery or violent incident:

Person in charge at the time of the incident

- Make sure that victims receive **prompt medical attention** if injured
- Notify your employer – if they are not on site
- Prepare an incident report

Employer

- Notify the **Police**
- Arrange **counselling** for the victim(s) because they may suffer from post 'traumatic stress'. The symptoms of post traumatic stress include increased heart rate, insomnia, muscle tension, hypersensitivity, fear of returning to work, depression, grief, guilt and anxiety
- Notify **WorkCover** within 7 days by filling out an Incident Notification form. All incidences must be reported whether a physical injury occurs or not

Further information

If you require further information contact the WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50.

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Catalogue No. **694** Ordering Hotline **13 10 50**



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Email contact@workcover.nsw.gov.au Website www.workcover.nsw.gov.au

ISBN 1 876995 54 8 ©Copyright WorkCover NSW 2002. Production and printing by cmSolutions – 02 9743 8777