

Smash and Grab Robberies on the Rise

By Joey Barroso

According to Honolulu Police Department in a KITV4 news article, there have been 577 burglaries as of May 25, 2022. The National Retail Federation (NRF) also reported that Organized Retail Crime (ORC) costs retail businesses an average of \$700,000 for every \$1 billion in sales a year. Criminals have capitalized on the accelerated shift to e-commerce brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, criminals are stealing large amounts of goods and reselling them to unsuspecting online shoppers at reduced prices. Flash mob robberies can carry numerous consequences for impacted retail businesses. In addition to lost merchandise, property damage and substantial recovery costs, these incidents can seriously threaten the safety of retail employees and other customers at the scene. A recent ORC method that has come to light is flash mob robberies. Also called “smash-and-grab” robberies, these incidents involve a group of criminals swarming a retail business all at once (sometimes with weapons), overwhelming staff and law enforcement on the scene, and attempting to steal mass amounts of merchandise.

Working in retail puts you at a particular risk of confronting a thief or intruder. The best practice for dealing with theft is with prevention.

Prevention Strategies

Establish an emergency response plan

- Crucial to have response protocols and lockdown procedures in place.
- Create a documented emergency response plan to minimize losses and protect employees (and customers) amid such an incident.
- Employees should be instructed to contact the appropriate authorities if they detect signs of a flash mob robbery.
- When a robbery begins, employees should know how to implement the necessary security systems, shut down the store and protect themselves from harm.
- Do not run after the perpetrator or intervene.
- Attacking a thief could mean harm to you and possibly the loss of your job.
- Do not follow the thief out of the store or shop. The possibility of causing harm to innocent bystanders escalates in this situation.
- Regularly review and update.

Train employees on how to detect and respond to potential signs of a robbery

- These signs may include a sudden emergence of excess vehicles in the store parking lot.
- A large group of people congregating outside the store or quickly heading toward the storefront.
- Customers who look like they may be carrying dangerous items or weapons.
- Employees should be stationed throughout the store during their shifts to be able to detect these signs.
- Greet and make eye contact with every person that enters.
- If you see suspicious behavior in any area, courteously ask the person if they need assistance.
- Always show that you are alert and aware of all customer activity by actively moving around the store.
- Lock the back doors whenever open for business.
- Be aware of and report any strange behavior, i.e., individuals loitering on the premises.

Utilize security systems

- Equip the store with various security systems to help deter criminals such as security cameras, laminated glass, merchandise sensors, proper lighting, and alarm systems.
- Consider security elements that can hinder criminals from fleeing the scene of a flash mob robbery, such as fog systems, strobe lights and roll-down gates.
- Hiring dedicated security personnel may also offer further protection.

Ensure proper product placement

- Place high-value merchandise in elevated areas or locked cases that are harder to reach without assistance.
- Place limited amounts of each product on store shelves and keep the excess inventory in a secure area.

Strategic Collaboration Is Critical

- Build strong relationships with local law enforcement, ORC prevention coalitions, neighboring businesses, local public safety officials, and follow any guidance they provide for avoiding flash mob robberies.
- Consider monitoring social media platforms for potential ORC plans or other suspicious activity.
- Keep the phone numbers of local authorities listed near all phones on the premises and memorized on your cell phone for quick access in the event of an emergency.

Secure adequate coverage

- Critical to ensure the proper protection against losses related to flash mob robberies by purchasing sufficient coverage.
- Commercial property insurance typically offers reimbursement to retail businesses that experience losses from theft or ORC.
- Consult a trusted insurance professional for further information on coverage solutions related to flash mob robberies.