

Preventing Burglary

A Guide for Retailers

The definition of burglary

A person is guilty of burglary if he or she enters any building as a trespasser intending to do any one of four things: steal, cause damage, inflict grievous bodily harm, or commit rape

You can help prevent burglary at your premises

This page provides information about crimes committed against retailers. It offers practical advice about what you can do as a retailer to deter and prevent burglars from breaking into your premises. This page offers ideas and options and these can of course be discussed in more detail with your local crime prevention department.

What is the Scale of the Problem?

Recorded Crimes

Home Office crime statistics do not separately identify burglaries against retail premises.

The Criminal Statistics for England and Wales do however separately record all non-residential burglaries (which include those committed against retailers) and these offences have grown by some two-thirds since 1989; although numbers fell slightly during 1993.

Surveys

The first Commercial Crime Survey by the Home Office shows that retail premises face a much higher risk of burglary than people's homes.

The British Retail Consortium's (BRC) annual survey of crime against retailers showed that – in 1993- there were 57 burglaries for every 100 retail premises. There were some 179,000 burglaries against retailers and the average loss (excluding those from post offices) was £1,228 per incident. The overall loss suffered by retailers was some £332 million, which was made up of stolen stock valued at £231 million, costs of a further £62 million in repairs and a further £39 million from trade lost after incidents took place. Only 3% of stock was recovered.

Ram Raids

Ram raids have caused great concern in recent years. The BRC's 1993 survey indicated that there were 17,750 such incidents, some 3% of all the burglaries committed against retailers. About the same value of stock is stolen in these incidents, but they do lead to substantially greater repairs (some five times greater than in the average incident).

Repeat Attacks

Police forces are becoming increasingly concerned about how often crimes are committed against the same places or individuals. The data in the BRC survey from single outlet businesses shows that many shops suffer repeat burglaries: over three-quarters of all burglaries committed against retailers are second, third - or even more frequent - attacks against the same premises in the course of the year.

Different Types of Retail Burglary

Smash and Grab

These burglaries, characterised by the violence of the burglars' entry, are the most common. Burglars may use paving stones to smash windows, scaffolding poles to lever up protective grilles, or power tools to cut padlocks or grilles off. In some cases they take only the goods in the window but more often they take high value stock on the shop floor. In ram raiding incidents, stolen vehicles are used to ram their way into shops. As with other crimes involving the misuse of motor vehicles, ram raiding raises serious public safety issues. The amount of damage caused in each incident also makes repairs particularly expensive.

Smash and grab attacks are usually to the front of the building, although rear shutters on out-of-town sites are a common target. They are carried out at great speed to avoid the effects of the alarm. Most are over within a minute.

Opportunistic

These burglaries lack obvious planning. Burglars usually enter through the most vulnerable points: through a roof-light, forcing a window, perhaps finding an insecure door. Sometimes they smash a window and steal from the window display. They seldom try to overcome the alarm system although they may take pains to avoid setting it off. Usually they take relatively little – typically only what can easily be carried off. 'Soft' targets who do not carry high value stock and do not go to great lengths to protect their shops are often the most vulnerable.

Sophisticated

In these incidents, burglars overcome alarm systems in various ways. They may cut the signalling of the alarm system, fill exterior alarm bells with foam to stop them sounding, and smash strobe lights. In some cases, the burglars avoid the alarm system either as a result of careful observation or through inside information. In others a common ploy is to set the alarm off repeatedly and wait until the police and key holders stop responding to it. With the alarm disabled the burglars have more time to act and will usually enter unobtrusively, forcing side or back doors or windows. Their usual target is high value stock and sometimes the safe (which is often removed entirely). Often their exit route is different from that used for entry. Once they have the run of the building burglars have been known to open up loading bays and bring in vehicles.

What can you do about it?

Slow Them Down

Time is a key factor in most burglaries. Burglars will put themselves at risk of being caught for as little time as possible. For them the risks are highest when they are conspicuous to passers-by or in the short time they have to complete their burglary after a burglar alarm has gone off. To prevent burglaries effectively, you should delay burglars at these times for as long as possible in order to make the risk seem unacceptable. The best way to do this is to put your resources into more than one of the types or levels of physical protection advised in this booklet – the more barriers you create, the more you will slow them down.

Train Your Staff

You need full support from your staff. Teach them about the burglary prevention measures you have taken, and the correct use of any equipment you have installed.

- Reporting suspicious circumstances

Explain to staff the importance, for example, of keeping a watchful eye for suspicious people or vehicles to prevent people 'casing' your premises.

- Get them involved

You can develop their commitment to crime prevention by asking their opinions and ideas about the measures you are taking or propose to take.

- Key security

Above all, you should build key security into your staff training programme. Ensure that only specially selected staff have access to certain keys or combination locks, and that keys to secure areas are not left within the shop. Selected staff or managers must thoroughly understand their responsibilities for locking and securing fastenings on windows and doors, cabinets, internal offices where cash may be held, safes, roof lights and any other exits.

- Help from your crime prevention officer

Your local crime prevention officer will be able to develop your awareness and knowledge about suitable crime prevention measures for your shop. He or she can also advise you about vetting new staff to reduce the risk of burglaries and other retail crimes being organised or assisted from within.

Look after Stock and Cash

- Removing high value goods from window displays

You can protect portable high value goods such as jewellery or camcorders by removing them from display windows overnight, and locking them in a safe, or a secure room or cage. But be aware of the drawbacks – the extra workload on you and your staff, and the likelihood that empty windows will attract less window shopping and therefore less 'informal' policing. (Having more people around increases the chance of there being witnesses who can call the police.)

- Hiding stock

Burglars will be less likely to break into your stock room if you hide what is in it boarding or whitewashing over the windows.

- Leave the till open

By leaving the till visible, open and clearly empty, any burglars seeking cash are likely to lose interest.

- Reducing stock

The less you have in stock to attract the thief, the less can be taken. By coordinating with suppliers you can introduce 'just in time' deliveries, use catalogue deliveries or home deliveries to reduce stock levels. But while such methods may minimise stock taken in a burglary, they are unlikely to deter a burglar unless he or she knows stock levels are low.

- Bank your cash

If you do not leave cash in the store overnight it cannot be stolen in a burglary. Night safe facilities are available after opening hours. If you do not use a specialist cash collection agency be sure you vary the route you take to the bank and the times you leave the shop.

- Dummy goods

In some cases, using dummy goods, (such as coloured water in wine bottles in off-licence displays, or empty CDs and cassette tapes) will deter some opportunistic burglars who only seek display goods, but you have to make it clear that the goods

are fake. This approach will not deter burglars seeking high value stock from inside the shop.

Physically Protect the Target

- **Strengthening Potential Entrances**

Use high quality (hardwood) door frames and doors, steel reinforcing and anti-thrust bolts on vulnerable doors, and bars on vulnerable windows. Glass panels in doors are particularly vulnerable to attack and ideally they should be avoided or boarded up. Ask for materials that comply at least to BS8220 for the construction industry as a minimum standard of strength. And the locks on doors should be at least up to the quality of a five lever mortice lock conforming to BS3621.

- **Grilles and Shutters**

These can be an excellent way of deterring burglars, but externally fitted varieties will need planning permission. There are three main types:

- Internal grilles are usually a thin lattice mesh that is lowered just behind the window. (Note that these do not protect the window and glass replacement is often the greatest cost in a burglary);

- External metal grilles are usually of the 'tube and link' design;

- External roller shutters (made from solid aluminium or steel strips or laths which can have 'windows' punched into them to allow window shoppers a glimpse of your wares).

External grilles and shutters usually roll up into a housing behind the fascia while the shop is trading; some are taken down in sections and stored inside the shop.

External shutters are strongly resisted by some planning authorities. Firstly, badly designed or solid shutters prevent window shopping and create a fortress – like hostile environment, reducing the numbers of passers-by at night. Which in turn may increase the level of crime? Secondly, their horizontal design and projecting housings seldom fit aesthetically with the design of a building, (and this is of particular importance in the case of listed buildings and conservation areas).

- **Fit grilles inside**

You can protect high value goods within the shop floor area by securing high risk display cabinets, such as for tobacco displays, with protective grilles and shutters.

- **Glass 'film'**

A reasonably cheap way of improving the strength of glass windows against smash and grab attacks is by applying a plastic film, available in various grades, to the rear of the window. This is a good deterrent but filmed glass windows are slightly less clear than non-filmed windows. Mirror-finished film on rear windows will both increase the strength of the glass and fully restrict a burglar's view into rear storage areas.

- **Laminated glass**

This is very difficult to break through in a 'smash and grab' attack because it is made by bonding a layer of tough plastic between sheets of glass, and this will hold the window together even after the glass has broken. However, to be effective you must ensure that window frames and fixings are equally strong, and bear in mind that you will often have to pay to replace the glass, even if the burglars were not able to take your stock.

- **Safes**

A good quality safe will protect cash and valuable items overnight but you should

take the added precaution of bolting it in place and positioning it discreetly. If you have, or are fitting a burglar alarm, you can include sensors inside the safe that will set the alarm off if the safe is opened. But beware buying a fire safe that doesn't necessarily protect against theft, and vice versa. Your insurers will be able to help you choose a suitable safe and suggest minimum standards of specification.

- **Secure cages**

Secure cages in the stock room can provide additional security for high value stock. They can be constructed using expanded metal sections or created by increasing the protection within an existing internal room.

- **Vehicle traps**

Fixing bollards into the ground around your premises will protect against ram raiders, but you will need to consult your local planning authority and your landlord. Some designs of bollard can be removed during trading hours. Large concrete plant containers can be used as an alternative to bollards. 'Road blocker' devices can be used to close off vehicle entrance overnight. Much depends on your location and circumstances. Your crime prevention officer can advise you.

- **The overall design**

If you are planning a move to a new building or intend making major refurbishments, you have an excellent opportunity to build preventive measures into the design of your premises. For example, you can build stall risers, put in multi-pane windows, ensure telephone lines are hidden and protect vehicle approaches. The Secured by Design scheme has been developed to help identify builders who have consulted the police and have incorporated specific crime prevention measures. The use of the Secured by Design logo is available to those who meet the required standards. You may also seek advice from our police force's architectural liaison officer (ALO) who is trained specifically in building design to prevent burglary and other crimes.

- **And if it happens**

Remember that if you have been unfortunate enough to have been burgled, the statistics show that your risk of being burgled again is much higher. So you will need to use the advice in this booklet to upgrade your defences and not merely put things back the way they were before the burglary. Obviously if an attack takes place you will have very little time to liaise with planning authorities, the police and so on – so make contingency plans now, and arrange what you will do if the worst happens.

Watching and Deterring Intruders

Intruder alarms

You may deter some potential burglars if you display evidence that you have fitted an intruder alarm. Others may be scared off if they are breaking in and hear alarm bells go off.

Video surveillance

Burglars are deterred by closed circuit television cameras monitoring the outside or inside of the building at night and they can also help police to detect the burglars. Stringent codes of practice need to be followed – including ensuring the date and time are incorporated into the recording – before video evidence can be successfully used in prosecution.

Controlling vehicle access

If a burglar cannot bring a vehicle close to your premises because his access is barred you eliminate the ram raider and become less attractive proposition to

burglars who depend on vehicles to drive stock away.

Locking escape routes

Commercial burglars often plan to use exit routes that are different from their entry routes. In view of this, you need to make it as difficult to get out as it is to get in. Make sure windows, doors, panic escape bars and internal doors are well locked overnight, and shut off the power supply for loading bay shutters. Make sure rear windows, doors, escape routes, and internal doors are well locked, and isolate the power supply for loading bay shutters.

Lighting

If you install lights that are activated by someone approaching your shop you may deter some potential burglars. Where your shop is overlooked by passers-by you will increase the chances of an intruder being noticed if you simply increase the level of lighting both inside and outside the building. But take care: if your shop is never overlooked at night (say because it is in an out-of-town shopping park) then increased lighting may simply make it easier for burglars to work.

For a copy of Your Practical Guide to Crime Prevention contact the Crime Reduction Officer at your local police station or write to:

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