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# Crime Prevention Guide

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*This guide was compiled by the Columbia Special Business District with the assistance of the Columbia Police Department. Extra copies of this guide may be obtained by calling 442-6816 or by logging on to [www.discoverthedistrict.com](http://www.discoverthedistrict.com).*

# Overview

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As a business owner, your goal is to prevent crime rather than simply respond to it. The District Crime Prevention Guide is designed to give you specific ways to reduce your vulnerability to crime.

- Learn how to conduct your own security surveys and determine what simple changes can be made to make your business less vulnerable.
- Read about what criminals look for when sizing up a business and learn what shoplifters consider “tricks of the trade.”
- Discover an easy technique to prevent bad checks.
- Learn a simple and effective way to reduce crime and vandalism.
- Redirect contributions of food and change to reduce panhandling.
- Learn about community policing and find out what programs are offered by the Columbia Police Department and their Community Action Team in the areas of workplace violence, shoplifting prevention, robbery survival, workplace safety, sexual assault prevention, and more.



To commit a crime, a criminal needs an opportunity. The recommendations included in this guide can help you reduce the opportunity of crime occurring in your business—and lets you focus on reaching your customers and building your bottom line.

# Fraud

*Fraud includes counterfeit currency, bad checks and credit cards. Counterfeit currency in circulation is on the rise due to recent innovations in color copier technology. For this reason, new security features are being added to U.S. currency. By learning these features, you can reduce your vulnerability to fraud.*

## **Recognizing Counterfeit Currency**

- Look carefully at bills of large denominations. Pay close attention to the quality of printing, paper characteristics, portraits, Federal Reserve and Treasury seals, borders and serial numbers.
- Look for print quality that is clear and razor sharp. Counterfeit bills are often fuzzy, blurry, uneven or faded. The paper itself often feels different.
- Or, a real bill (such as a \$5) is bleached to remove the graphics and a larger denomination (such as a \$50) is color scanned over it. That way, the paper will feel correct and a special counterfeiting pen will not identify the fraud.
- Look at a real bill and notice that the serial numbers and the Treasury seals are always printed in the same color ink and the numbers are spaced evenly and aligned properly.
- Look for small red and blue fibers or threads woven throughout the genuine bill. Sometimes counterfeiters will try to trick you by drawing little red and blue lines on a fake bill.



- To reduce counterfeit fraud, all paper money except for the \$1 carries a printed denomination identifier along a thin strip woven into the bill on the left side of the Federal Reserve seal. It can be seen by holding it up to the light.

- New bills have color shifting ink on the number in the lower right corner.
- New bills also have a watermark in the blank space to the right of the portrait.
- New bills have extensive microprinting, seen more clearly with a magnifying glass.

## **How to Handle Counterfeit Currency**

- Do not put yourself in danger.
- Do not return the note to the passer.
- If you receive a counterfeit bill, try to hold on to it and delay the person while you or someone else calls the police. You may also send someone to a local bank for verification. (However, never put yourself or your employees in danger to do this.)
- Write down a description of the person who gave you the bill and their vehicle and license plate, if possible.
- Write your initials and the date on the suspected currency and put it in an envelope to preserve the fingerprints of the criminal.
- Telephone the police or the U.S. Secret Service.

## **Bad Checks**

- Always ask for a picture I.D. when someone pays by check. Compare signatures on the check to other forms of I.D.
- Many fraudulent checks are visibly fake, so pay close attention to the check's appearance. Does the check appear to have been altered? Look for checks that appear to have altered writing, erasures or watermarks.
- Take part in the Fingerprint I.D. Program where customers use "clean" ink to fingerprint their checks. Fraudulent checks can then be compared to the State Highway Patrol's fingerprint database.
- Do not accept post-dated checks or a check with a signature that does not match the imprinted name. Take note of checks that are numbered under 500 because this denotes a new account.



- If you receive a fraudulent check, contact the prosecutor's office at 886-4116. They can help you file charges.

## **Credit Cards**

- Always take a good look at any credit card presented to you for payment. Look for any alterations on the card, such as ghost numbers or letters. Thieves often try to melt or file down the original name and numbers on a stolen card.
- When a customer pays with a credit card, hold on to it until the transaction is complete. Make sure the signature on

the card matches that on the sales receipt.



- Look at the signature strip for any changes. Sometimes thieves use white-out to hide the original signature and write a new one on top.
- Watch for cards listed as canceled, expired or stolen. If someone presents an unsigned credit card, ask them to present other forms of I.D. to verify their name and signature.
- Ask for photo I.D. Also watch for customers who make several small purchases by check or credit card which are below the amount that would require approval from a manager or a bank.
- Train employees to follow your full authorization procedure; don't allow short cuts, even during the busy holiday season.
- Make sure your store has a return policy to prevent fraud. Consider policies such as offering store credit for returns or mailing the check to the home of the person listed on the credit card receipt.
- Look for customers who try to rush or distract the cashier, have trouble with the signature, or attempt to make big purchases right when you open or just before closing.
- If you think you have a stolen credit card, call the issuing bank or the police and try to delay the person without putting yourself in danger.

# Vandalism

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*Vandalism is property damage that ranges in severity and includes graffiti. It often occurs after hours, after dark, and in the warmer months of the year. There are a number of ways to prevent or discourage vandalism of your property.*

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- **Turn on a light!** Lights are the best thing you can do right now to reduce vandalism. This means checking for burnt out bulbs, replacing low watt bulbs for higher watt ones, and even installing outdoor floodlights with motion sensors.
- Keep some interior lights on at night as well. This helps keep the sidewalk lit and is also a great way to show off your merchandise.
- Keep your building and the surrounding area clean and well-maintained. People will be less likely to vandalize property that is well-cared for.
- Immediately paint over any graffiti. It's not important that it looks perfect, it's important that it's covered right away.
- Before you leave at night, make sure any rocks, bricks, bottles or other similar objects are removed from your sidewalk.
- Consider installing motion-sensor lights in back alleys, over doors or in darker alcoves. These lights will draw unwanted attention to vandals.
- When landscaping, use plants with thorns to discourage vandals from pulling them out of the ground.
- Take a close look at the outside of your business. Are you unwillingly encouraging vandalism? Do you leave items outside overnight? Did you put chairs outside your door that have been taken over by non-customers?
- Is the alley behind your store cleared of debris that would allow people onto your roof, or give someone a destructive tool? (Alleys running north/south are not city property. They are private and must be cleaned by the property owners and businesses.)
- Are the alleys well light? The east-west alleys have city lights so call Water and Light at 874-7325 for bulb replacement or to request additional lights be installed.
- Call the Community Action Team of the Columbia Police Department at 874-7425 for a safety survey of your property. They can help get you started on this process.
- The District office will provide downtown businesses with free graffiti remover. Just call us at 442-6816 for a can.



# Burglary

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*Burglary is the unauthorized entry of a place of business, a home or other premises for the purpose of committing a crime. Burglary is a crime of opportunity! Burglars look for easy targets—shops with poor lighting or little security. A good way to check if your building is vulnerable is to conduct your own security survey. Look closely at your building's exterior and try to locate any weak spots.*

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## **Smart Tips Checklist – Inside**

- Safeguard all valuable merchandise, cash, checks, records, keys and alarm codes.
- Engrave, photograph and record serial numbers of company equipment such as your cash register, safe, computers and calculators.



- Leave your cash register open and empty at night. This one step can save you the cost of repairing or replacing a broken register.
- Use strong locks, alarms, safes and other security devices to deter burglars.
- Ask your alarm company about a back-up system in case your phone lines are cut.
- Maintain tight inventory controls to help identify any losses quickly and accurately.
- Secure storage areas to reduce access to all parts of your store.

## **Smart Tips Checklist – Outside**

- Make sure your store name and address are clearly marked on both the front and rear of the premises.
- Inspect all entry points, including windows, doors, vents, air conditioner openings, skylights, rooftop access and walls.
- Move dumpsters away from walls if possible and clear away all debris such as trash cans, litter, boxes or pallets that could be used as a tool.
- Plan all landscaping with security in mind. Don't provide a hiding place for criminals.
- Light your building both inside and out, because lighting is the number one deterrent to crime.
- Use exterior doors of solid wood, steel or steel-plating with strong frames.
- Use double-cylinder dead-bolt locks and hinges that are placed on the inside to prevent easy removal.
- If you choose to put security screens over your windows, use see-through glass.

# Shoplifting

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*Shoplifting is the deliberate theft of store merchandise. Conduct your own store security survey through the eyes of a thief to help reduce this crime.*

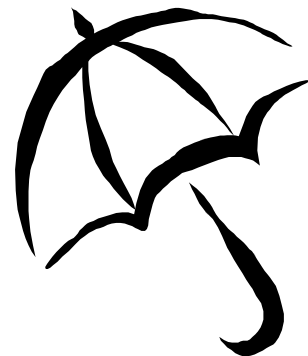
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## **Smart Store Design**

- Check the lighting levels throughout your store. Good store lighting makes it tougher to conceal theft.
- Display merchandise to allow quick visual reference in the event anything is missing. Areas crowded with inventory make it easier for a shoplifter to steal and mask your loss.
- Limit the height of store shelving and displays. Remove any blind spots that prevent the entire store from being surveyed at a glance.
- Use security devices such as convex mirrors, closed circuit television and sensor tags to help minimize your potential for loss.
- Remember that some thieves steal by removing or switching price tags.
- Train all employees to spot suspicious behavior, to be aware of shoplifting tricks and understand the local shoplifting laws.
- Establish an emergency alert system so your sales staff can discreetly keep an eye on suspicious individuals. Contact your neighboring stores if you see a suspicious shopper.
- Instruct employees to greet each customer. An attentive, well-trained staff is the best defense against shoplifting.

## **How Shoplifters Operate**

- There is no such thing as a typical shoplifter. They come in all sizes and backgrounds and can work alone or in teams.
- Shoplifters appear to wander about aimlessly throughout a store, and often spend more time sizing up the employees than shopping for merchandise.
- A common method is to slip merchandise into pockets, under clothing or into bags. Some shoplifters even have special purpose equipment or clothing, such as fake slings or casts.



- Thieves have been caught placing merchandise into umbrellas, diaper bags, large purses or even in baby strollers. Also watch out for shopping bags full of empty shoe boxes.
- Shoplifters are often dressed inappropriately for the weather, such as wearing large coats on a sunny day.
- Seeking to avoid recognition, thieves will avoid eye contact, appear jittery and make quick, furtive movements. They may quickly place items back on the shelf whenever an employee approaches.
- Thieves often rely on refund scams, stealing items to return at a later date.

## **If You Spot a Shoplifter**

- If you suspect someone of shoplifting, keep an eye on them at all times and watch their hands. If a shoplifter suspects detection, they may discard the merchandise or slip it to a partner.
- Use employee-to-employee and store-to-store alert systems—such as a code word—to signal others to a possible shoplifter.
- You and your co-workers should approach the suspect in a team whenever possible and identify yourselves as store employees. Ask the suspect to accompany you to the office or stock room to prevent a commotion.
- Avoid physical confrontation or contact with the suspect to prevent any legal complications or injury.
- If you suspect a shoplifter, call the police and tell them you have a shoplifter on the premises. Any hold-up alarms should not be triggered to catch a shoplifter.
- Be prepared to prosecute.

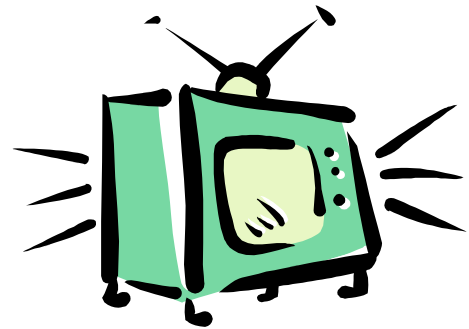


# Robbery

*Robbery is theft by force or threat of force. Robbers seek easy targets, such as stores with ample cash-on-hand or has clear and easy entry and escape routes.*

## **Design Your Business to Deter Robbers**

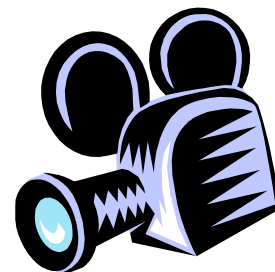
- Make sure your store has adequate lighting inside and out. Also make sure that your address is clearly visible so the police do not waste valuable time.
- Use peepholes, intercoms and buzzers on rear or side doors to make sure you are not surprised by a robber.
- Consider raising the floor beneath your cash register a few inches. This will allow you to see your store better and will prevent anyone from seeing directly into your cash drawer.
- Make sure your cash register is in a highly visible part of your store.
- Place signs and banners at the top or bottom of your windows. Eye-level signs block sight lines into your store and give robbers a safe zone.
- Limit your accumulation of cash on-site and vary bank deposit schedules. Encouraging debit and credit cards also limits the amount of cash in your store.
- Use clear security films, glazing or laminates to deter smash and grab bandits from breaking your display cases and stealing valuable merchandise.
- Place hold-up alarms throughout the store, especially near the register, stock room, or other hidden locations where they can be discreetly and safely activated.
- Set up a buddy system with a neighboring merchant in the event of an emergency.
- When working alone, turn on a radio or television in the storage area or bathroom to make it appear as if there are other employees on site.



- For added protection, consider using closed circuit television, convex mirrors, security personnel and other security technology to prevent robberies.

## **Special Suggestions for Security Videos**

- Video systems must be maintained properly to be effective!
- Have a procedure in place to outline who is responsible for replacing video tapes. Also determine how often tapes should be replaced.
- The Police Department recommends having 31 total tapes, using a different one for each day of the month. After one year of use, all tapes should be replaced.



- Once a month, clean the lenses of the cameras and check the positioning of the cameras to make sure they are still recording the correct area.
- Have several blank videos on hand in case law enforcement personnel collects one for evidence.

### **Employee Training**

- Instruct employees to greet each customer. This will eliminate the criminal's best weapon—surprise.
- Train employees to be alert to strange or suspicious behavior, especially during opening or closing times.
- Develop an emergency code for your employees that can discreetly put everyone on the alert when someone suspicious enters the store.

### **If Confronted by a Robber**

- Cooperate. Nothing is more valuable than your life or the lives of your employees.
- If possible, discreetly activate the hold-up alarm or buddy system.
- Try to keep calm. Try not to focus on the weapon; this will only add to your nervousness.
- Make mental notes about the robber's appearance, behavior, speech and route of escape.
- Using a weapon for your own defense is a personal decision, but make sure you know the law. If you use a weapon, obtain a license and practice regularly. Otherwise, you could turn a bad situation into a deadly one.

- Call 911 immediately! A robber can hold-up another store within one minute.
- After the robber has fled, lock your door and ask all witnesses to remain. Do not touch anything the robber may have handled. Write down everything you can remember about the crime immediately and encourage witnesses to do so as well.
- Be prepared to prosecute.
- The Crime Prevention Unit of the Columbia Police Department offers mock-robbery training for business owners and employees. Call 874-7405 for more information.

# Panhandling

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Business districts across the nation are facing the problem of panhandling and, unfortunately, this is a problem that will never go away completely. However, there are things you can do to lessen the problem. The Columbia Special Business District is currently working with the City of Columbia to address long-term solutions to this problem. Meanwhile, we've teamed with the Columbia Area United Way on an educational campaign designed to redirect donations to social service organizations dedicated to providing food, housing and emergency services to those in need.

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## **Don't Become a "Supplier"**

- **Do not offer cash to panhandlers.** Panhandlers will congregate where there is a ready supply of spare change. That spare change could be used to feed an addiction.
- **Do not offer food, water, coffee, clothing or other items.** Social service organizations already provide meals, showers and clothing to people in need. In addition, these organizations are better equipped to deal with other, more serious needs a person may have. Donate items or cash to these organizations instead.
- **Do not offer use of bathrooms or sidewalk seating.** These comforts will encourage people to gather outside your business. Besides, your customers don't want to walk a gauntlet to reach your front door.
- **If you sell alcoholic beverages, be discriminate.** You are not obligated to sell to everyone and do not have to sell to someone who is intoxicated or who has caused problems in the past. Single servings of alcohol – such as 40 oz. beers – are usually consumed on the sidewalk.
- **Report all problems.** The police will not know there is a problem unless you report it. If you do not leave your name and contact information or if you refuse to sign a complaint, no action can be taken by the police.

## **Spread the Word**

- **Educate your employees.** Set a strict policy with your employees and make sure they understand what encourages panhandling. Make sure they know to call the non-emergency number (442-6131) if there are any problems.
- **Educate your customers.** Hang our poster in your window and distribute our brochures (stuff one into every bag or place one on every table). Let customers know there are better options. Have them visit [www.ChangeforColumbia.com](http://www.ChangeforColumbia.com) for more information or to make a donation.
- **Talk to college students.** College students are particularly generous with their change, especially when leaving bars at night. Make sure they understand this is not the way to help someone in need.
- **Send a message.** Change for Columbia posters and brochures are available to all businesses at [www.ChangeforColumbia.com](http://www.ChangeforColumbia.com) or by calling our office at 442-6816.

## **Know the Law**

- **Learn what is allowable behavior.** Officers cannot enforce what we might call loitering or vagrancy. It is legal for people to congregate in public areas.
- **Learn what behavior is not allowed.** Officers can enforce aggressive and intentional blocking of the sidewalks and doors, open containers, disturbing the peace, and aggressive panhandling (verbal abuse, repeated requests, threats or physical contact).

# How to Report a Crime

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## Whom Should You Call?

- 911. Best for urgent problems. Give the operator all the information you can: description of problem, description of suspects, license plate number, your name and address, and so on. That way, if the problem is over by the time the police arrive, they may still be able to locate the suspects in the area.
- Non-emergency number (442-6131) for other problems. This number feeds to a dispatcher who will prioritize your call and route it to an officer when he or she is free. So if there is an emergency somewhere else in the area, it will take some time before an officer is alerted to your call.



- Officer Cathy Dodd. The non-emergency number should be your first call because it will go to the first available officer. However, our beat officer Cathy Dodd should be alerted to all ongoing problems or concerns you may have. Officer Dodd walks her beat Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Her pager number is 499-8457.

- Always call. Do not avoid calling because the problem doesn't seem serious or because you don't want to overwhelm the police. They will never know about ongoing problems unless you keep calling. Be persistent but also be polite.
- If you do not leave your name and contact information, no action can be taken by the police because there will be no one to file a complaint.
- Never try to apprehend a criminal yourself.

## What Can the Police Enforce?

- Officers cannot enforce what we might call loitering or vagrancy. It is legal for people to congregate in public areas.
- Officers can enforce:
  - ✓ Aggressive and intentional blocking of the sidewalks.
  - ✓ Disturbing the peace.
  - ✓ Aggressive panhandling (verbal abuse or physical contact).
  - ✓ Open-container violations.
- In order to enforce any of these violations, the person calling the police must file a complaint.

# How can you help?

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*Crime prevention is everybody's business. It affects all of us—no matter where you live, work or shop. Make sure you're watching out for yourself and your neighbors.*

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- Preventing crime is everyone's job. Are you working together with the police, the SBD office and your neighbors to solve the problem or are you waiting for someone else to fix it?
- The first step in fighting crime is to unite with your neighboring merchants. Talk with merchants on your block, in the surrounding businesses, and join your local business association.
- Take the time to alert the police and fellow shopkeepers to crime problems or suspicious activities. Note the time and day these problems occurred and schedule your staff accordingly.
- Size up your business as a criminal might—through the eyes of a burglar, vandal or thief. Take specific steps to reduce your vulnerability to crime or vandalism.
- Identify the type of merchandise that is stolen most frequently. Where is it placed in the store and how is it displayed? Is your staff trained to handle problems?
- Review the security measures or management controls you have taken to reduce the potential for loss.
- If you hear about crime in your neighborhood, do not be fooled by rumors. Contact the Columbia Police Department to learn the facts.
- The Columbia Police Department will conduct a free safety survey of your business, help train doormen for your club or bar, and do bar walkthroughs at night.
- The police also offering training in areas of workplace violence, shoplifting prevention, robbery survival, workplace safety, sexual assault prevention and more. Call 874-7405 for more information.

