

CREDIT CARD ABUSE, FORGERY AND SHOPLIFTING PREVENTION

American businesses lose millions of dollars each year to these types of fraud and theft. Training is available to civic groups and businesses that will make their employees more aware and knowledgeable about these types of crimes. The training discusses such topics as the tactics of credit card abusers and how to discourage hot check writing and shoplifting in your place of business.

Some of the points covered in these presentations are inclusive of, but not limited to, the following:

BAD CHECKS & CREDIT CARD ABUSE

Some of the things to look for range from basic information to more detailed inspection of the checks/credit cards/type of I.D. used, etc.

- * Does the check presented have a perforated edge on one or more sides? (Showing it has been taken from a standard personal checkbook or company check log).
- * What is the check # (is it low, indicating a "new account"?) Is it a high number, indicating an older established account? Note: just because it is a high number doesn't necessarily mean the account is "old" or "established" it is just a possible indicator.
- * Do the signatures match on the check and the I.D.?
- * Do the checks appear to be altered or have signs of erasure, mismatched type, etc.?
- * Is the numerical amount of the check and the written amount of the check the same? Correct date and signed?
- * Is the check written on a familiar bank? Local or out of town, etc.
- * What is your policy on accepting checks for more than the amount of purchase? Does it need a review?
- * What is your policy on cashing payroll and/or two party checks? Does it need a review? These type checks can be trouble under certain circumstances.
- * Look for obvious signs of tampering on credit cards such as erasures to signature lines on the back, double or re-stamped characters on name and number embossments.

- * Many cards have holograms, are they the symbol that goes with that company's card? Have they been tampered with, added on, etc.
- * What is your policy on asking for photo I.D. along with the credit card (even if the card has a photo on it) verify the person with the card is who they say they are.
- * Use common sense, do things "add up"? For instance, if the credit card is in the name of Dr. John Smith and the person presenting it is a 17 year old girl would you question the presentation of this card? Note : the 17 year old could very well be an authorized user/holder of this card and review your policy on this type situation.
- * Look at the magnetic stripe on the back of the card, here are a few reasons: has it been deliberately scratched, marred, or partially removed, or is it otherwise defective (possibly demagnetized)? There are many reasons for this to have happened, the strip is encoded with information and can be accidentally damaged (and innocently so) criminals on the other hand often do this in order to prevent normal "checking" of the information through electronic means. Thus forcing the "check" to be done by phone or the old fall back, the printed list of stolen/lost cards. If it is a recent stolen/lost card it may not be on the list yet. If the name or numbers on the card have been altered the same may be true. Then there are the criminals that will present these cards during very busy times or to the obviously frustrated or new employee that will not take the time to go through various procedures to properly get "authorization". This method is used with processing checks properly.

SHOPLIFTING

There are many types of shoplifters and just as many if not more reasons why they shoplift. The following is a sampling of information and discussion available.

Some shoplifters are categorized as "grazers", such as in grocery type stores, they go through, and like cattle, they graze... opening a package or box as they go, and eat, drink, snack, etc. and either replace or discard the leftovers or packaging without paying. Others shoplift for need, want, on a dare, to supply their "vanities" (cosmetics, perfumes, etc.). Some shoplift as a profession. Most shoplifters generally have enough money on them to pay for what they are stealing. The manner in which shoplifters operate varies widely, and has been documented on in-store video and personal observation by "Loss-Prevention" personnel again and again. The thefts are carried out by individuals, pairs and by well organized "teams" of professional shoplifters. Often the boldness of some of these thieves shocks even well seasoned police and loss-prevention specialists.

Make no mistake by thinking these are non-violent criminals. There have been numerous shoplifting incidents that have started on a small scale and escalated to robbery, causing injury, and in some incidents even death. Your business should review it's procedures on shoplifting, actions to take and/or NOT to take, decisions

of whether to apprehend, detain, etc. and insure that policies/guidelines are adhered to by employees.

Some things to watch for ("Red Flags") that may indicate shoplifting is in process or about to occur are:

* The shifting of merchandise in the business. Most businesses have their more expensive merchandise in particular areas, watch for merchandise that has been picked up and moved to another area of the store or business. (If a team is working in tandem one will generally pick up, move and replace an item or items then leave and a second person will come in pick it up and leave).

* Watch for distraction techniques. Loud noises, rude customers, demanding customers, spanking and screaming at kids, asking for an item behind the clerk (to get them to turn around) have all been used as distraction techniques to aid shoplifters. (If the cash drawer or locked cabinet is open... don't turn your back!) This list goes on and on and makes for a good discussion.

Deterrents

The following are just a few basic actions/procedures to aid in deterring theft/shoplifting. There are many, many more that are workable and effective.

* Maintain ACTIVE floor workers (sales and stock clerks). Greet everyone as they enter (Now you have not only acknowledged their presence, but you may be able to supply a description).

* Make a statement to customers like, "If you need help with anything just wave or look my way, I'll see you".

* Re-stock shelves, don't leave gaps in merchandise and a full shelf makes it possible to tell at a glance if something is gone and on the same note, if you don't keep your merchandise out how can you sell it? This constant stocking, straightening, etc. also keeps you mingling with the customers, and if there is a thief he/she is not alone and out of sight to steal.

* Inventory regularly and as often as possible.