

## **Personal and Business Safety Tips with MPD Crime Prevention Officer Rodney Wilson**

Wednesday, Nov. 26, 2014

*-Meeting notes, Mary Carbine, Business Improvement District (BID)*

### **EXISTING RESOURCES from MPD**

[Robbery Response](#)

[Retail Theft Prevention and Best Practices](#)

[Crime Prevention Tips for Business Owners](#) (includes robbery)

### **GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **Surroundings**

Develop and practice “situational awareness.” Most of us develop habits, routes to work, where we don’t notice our surroundings. Are you staying aware of your surroundings? What has changed? New employees – make sure they know the total business environment. Where are all rooms? Where do doors go? Are doors secure?

#### **Sightlines**

Can you see outside the store, and can others see in? You want visibility, so that employees can be aware of what is outside the store, and so any robbery, etc., could be seen from the outside. Look at window displays, posters – are they arranged to preserve line of sight?

#### **Doors & Customer Path**

Are all entrances/exits secure? Be aware of customer pathway-criminals will use same routes as customers or employees.

#### **Cameras**

Just installing cameras is not enough. You need to make sure the images are usable. Review footage taken at normal times. Are there dead spots? Is the angle wrong? Is there enough quality to see faces? Are you cleaning the lenses regularly, making sure the camera is not obscured? Review for lighting, adjust for color “trueness” (use some of your product). Does blue clothing look black on the camera? Is it different at night? **IMPORTANT:** Make sure employees know how to download footage from the camera. If there is an incident, you want to get images to police ASAP, not be waiting for the one store employee who knows how to download images. Exterior signage notifying that you have cameras can be helpful as a deterrent.

#### **Alarms**

If you have one, test it periodically so it works when you need it. Make sure employees know what it does, and when to use it. Does alarm go to security company? Might it be better to dial 911 for “incidents in progress”?

## RETAIL THEFT

When does it become a crime? When person leaves last point of purchase (can be register).

What can you do before last point of purchase? If you observe concealment and just want your stuff back, you can approach them and ask to recover your stuff (and ban them from your store), but if they are not past last point of purchase it is not the crime of retail theft.

Policy to prosecute all shoplifters? Consider a policy of when you prosecute, because if you use discretion, you are open to challenge (why did you prosecute person A but not person B?) Also, people (including criminals) are “patternable,” and they talk. It will become known if you do or don’t prosecute. If you have a policy to prosecute shoplifters, consider exterior signage to announce.

Should you pursue, confront, try to stop or detain? While it may be instinct to try to stop someone, think twice before trying to engage physically. You open yourself to liability claims, plus, most people do not have regular practice with physical combat with someone who may be desperate, might be armed, have a quick trigger, and is willing to fight. If you choose to follow a suspect, be on the cell phone with the police to give them location, follow at a safe distance (you do not know suspect mind frame or what they are capable of, are they carrying?), and don’t leave your store unattended.

Whatever your philosophy, all employees must be on the same page. Have a standard procedure, know what your employees are comfortable with and capable of saying, and practice it periodically.

Sample words or phrases to use with someone who is shoplifting/has concealed merchandise:

- Would you like a basket to carry your items?
- Would you like to pay for that necklace that is in your purse?
- I know you have a [product] in your shirt. Let’s go to the register now so you can pay for that.
- Would you like a pair of pants to go with that shirt?
- There’s a shirt in your jacket right now. Why don’t you take it out, and let’s go pay for that.
- Sir/Madam, did you forget something?
- We’ve called the police.

It is important to show confidence. Criminals will sense and play upon vulnerability, and may accuse employees. Employees who are trained in customer service and want to help people may find it difficult to believe people actually behave that way. Having a store policy helps instill confidence.

TIP from a merchant: Show employees (especially new ones) your security camera footage of customers shoplifting, so they understand that anyone including that “nice customer” can and does shoplift. Also, shoplifters frequently return to same place where they were successful.

Other prevention tips:

- High dollar items behind the counter, or at least in place that can be monitored by employees.
- Limit large # of bags or backpacks that can be carried into the store.
- Restrooms – consider having key behind counter so folks must request access. Policy of no bags in restroom.
- Consider policy of no masks or hoods worn in store (like a bank), must post to that effect.

See also [Retail Theft Prevention and Best Practices](#)

## **ARMED SITUATION**

The whole picture changes with an armed robbery. In that situation, the suspect is deciding the crime and how it will go, and has already decided to use force. It is not the employee's fault.

Once a suspect has decided to do an armed robbery, they will not want anything to get in their way. If the suspect encounters obstruction or frustration, that is when things escalate.

In an armed situation:

- Be compliant, and give the suspect what he or she wants, quickly.
- The bank approach – stay calm, be low key, get it done, get the suspect out as quickly as possible.

It is usually very quick, 14-15 seconds, so you must think of what to train for in that time period. Many people freeze from fear, so you need to train and rehearse with employees so they are able to comply quickly and stay safe.

- Know how to open the register quickly (under stress)
- Give the suspect what they want, step back from register, get the suspect out. Show low “open hands” with palms facing upward (the gesture of giving + gentle “move along”). “Here’s all we’ve got.”
- Once suspect is gone, walk over and lock the door, call police.
- Try to observe, remember as much as you can.

Best strategy is to think about prevention.

- Consider having two employees on duty, especially at vulnerable times (closing). Easier to rob a place with a lone clerk.
- Make sure employees are aware of who is in store and are focused on surroundings.
- Make practice of keeping low cash drawers. Consider signage to that effect. Keep larger amounts in a safe. If they hit you once and don't get much, may help prevent future problems.
- Greet all customers as they enter – good customer service, plus shows you are aware someone is in your store.
- Be proactive. Are people loitering around outside, behaving strangely, do you sense “casing”? Can employee go over and lock door?

See also [Crime Prevention Tips for Business Owners](#) and [Robbery Response](#).

## **BURGLARIES**

Prevention tips:

- Recent pattern of business burglary – throwing rocks through windows to gain access. Remove any bricks, stones to prop open doors, etc., from business surroundings when you close.
- Leave tills propped up and visible through window when closed – shows you do not have any money
- Lighting – have store well lit after hours so burglars would be visible from outside.

To schedule a personal safety course for your business contact, Madison Police Department Crime Prevention Coordinator Rodney Wilson at [rwilson@cityofmadison.com](mailto:rwilson@cityofmadison.com) or call 266-4238.