

Preventing Retail Burglary

This guide is one in a series of crime prevention publications designed to equip current and potential Safe City partners with low-cost tools to assess their crime problems and to develop strategies to address them. Other guides in this series include vandalism, car crimes, public disorder, panhandling, and shoplifting.



Safe City is a model community-based initiative that aims to reduce crime, build awareness, and develop communities into safer places to live, work, and shop. Community partners in cities across the U.S. modify the model to best suit their needs and resources. The goal is to leverage existing resources by building collaborative relationships between law enforcement, businesses, residents, government leaders, property managers, and community organizations. This approach maximizes the tactical, financial, technological, and human resources available to address a community's crime problems. The Safe City model promotes partnerships and technical solutions as instrumental building blocks for success. These partnerships are further strengthened by individual retailers taking ownership over the crime and disorder problems occurring in and around their businesses.

Safe City has partnered with the Urban Institute, a non-profit policy research firm, to develop a variety of crime prevention strategies for use in retail settings, many of which are inexpensive and easy to implement. For more information about the Safe City program, please visit www.mysafecity.com. For more information about the Urban Institute's justice policy research activities, please visit www.urban.org/justice.

Understanding Retail Burglary

Retail Burglary involves the breaking and entering into a business with the intent of stealing items. It often involves costly damage to the building and the loss of valuable merchandise, both of which can be detrimental to the livelihood of one's business.

Retail Burglary Patterns

Retail burglaries typically occur at night and/or after regular business hours. In most cases, burglars enter through doors or windows and leave before police or security are able to respond. Although less common, "ram raids" and "smash and grabs" involve ramming a car or other objects into a retail building, attempting to grab as many items as possible, and then making a quick escape.

In general, burglars are motivated by economic gain, although some simply enjoy the excitement of stealing merchandise. While most burglars are opportunistic, a small share are skilled professionals, employing sophisticated planning and methods, and therefore committing many successful burglaries. Regardless of whether they are professional or opportunistic, most retail burglars select stores located in isolated areas or those known to have poor security features, such as low lighting, insufficient locks, no window bars, or lack of formal security systems.

Like shoplifters, burglars tend to choose targets based on convenience or the desirability of goods located in the store. They are particularly interested in expensive items that are easily portable, such as electronics, liquor, cigarettes, designer clothing, or recorded music and video. The acronym "CRAVED" was created to highlight attributes of commonly stolen merchandise that make them vulnerable to theft (see sidebar). Stores with pharmacies are often targeted for burglaries of popular regulated drugs, such as

OxyContin or Dalaudid, as well as those drugs with restricted sales, such as pseudoephedrine.

Burglaries are not random phenomena, with both business size and the surrounding area's crime rate playing some role in the probability of being burglarized. Small U.S. businesses, particularly in low-income urban areas, have the highest retail burglary crime rates. Stores that have been burgled once are at increased risk for repeat victimization. Twenty-four hour stores, with the constant presence of people, have the lowest risk of burglary.

In its annual "Crime in the United States" publication, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates that in 2005 approximately 35 percent of burglaries were of non-residential buildings, which includes retail stores. Retail burglary, particularly repeat burglaries, present enormous costs to businesses – often leading businesses to lay off workers, increase prices, or even close stores entirely. Perhaps more discouraging to business owners and employees is that burglary cases typically go unsolved unless a burglar is apprehended at the crime scene. Without adequate evidence, burglaries have both the lowest arrest and clearance rates of all serious crimes reported to the FBI annually.

Addressing Retail Burglary

Common strategies to prevent retail burglary involve environmental changes to property. External measures, such as improving lighting or strengthening windows and doors, can be combined with in-store security measures, such as installing alarms or video surveillance systems (i.e. CCTV) or having staff on duty 24-hours a day (Clarke 2002). Many of these measures, can also be used to prevent other types of crime addressed in the Safe City guide series.

Using this Guide

This guide is designed to help you and your partners understand and address the retail burglary problem affecting your business area and to help promote dialogue among retailers, police, and community stakeholders about these issues. Keep in mind that when implementing these strategies you should tailor your solution to the unique nature of your crime problem and business environment.

Other guides in this series address vandalism, car crimes, public disorder, panhandling, and shoplifting.

Quick Tips

Here are a few guiding steps that can help prevent burglary:

- 1 Measure your burglary problem.
- 2 Identify business practices that may make you vulnerable to burglary.
- 3 Choose a practical strategy to reduce burglary and try it.
- 4 Measure your burglary problem again to assess the impact of your strategy.
- 5 Modify your strategy if necessary.

CRAVED:

Description of Commonly Stolen Items (Clarke 2002)

Concealable: Easily hidden in pockets, bags, or under clothing

Removable: Portable and easy to carry

Available: Widely available or easy to find

Valuable: Expensive and favorable resale value or status among peers

Enjoyable: Enjoyable to own or consume

Disposable: Easy to resell

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Defining Your Problem

Before implementing a strategy to prevent retail burglary, it is important to define the nature of the burglary problem for your area. Although there are many methods you may use to address retail burglary on your own, a community-wide response that incorporates other area businesses, agencies, and public services is beneficial to address any underlying community problems which may be related to burglary. Community partners should consider the questions that appear below. Answers to these questions will help you understand the problem affecting your business area so that you can select an appropriate response strategy.

Questions to Ask:	Example Responses:
How many times has your business been burglarized in the last quarter?	My business was burglarized twice in the last quarter.
If you have been burglarized more than once, have burglars stolen the same items? What was stolen?	Yes, each time MP3 players were stolen.
What time of day or day of week did the burglary occur?	The burglaries occurred at night after the business closed. One occurred on Sunday and the other on Friday.
If you have been burglarized more than once, have burglars entered your building in the same manner each time? How did they enter your building?	No, the first burglars entered the building by breaking through the building's rear doors. The second set of burglars entered through windows in the rear of the building.
Are other area businesses experiencing burglaries?	Yes, I have spoken with two other businesses nearby who have been burglarized around the same time I have.
Do other area businesses experience similar building entry tactics?	The other businesses do not have rear windows so they only experienced doorway entries.
Are other area businesses losing similar items to burglars?	One of the other businesses sells similar items and experienced thefts of MP3 players. Another business experienced a pharmacy break-in.

Developing Response Strategies

After you've worked with your partners to define the burglary problem for your area, you are ready to develop a response strategy to prevent it. The following are strategies that can be used for common retail burglary scenarios. Do not forget that situations vary and that yours may require a tailored response. In addition, be prepared for potential implementation challenges, such as unanticipated costs and delays in both the implementation and impact of your crime prevention strategy.

It is important to measure your burglary problem before and after initiating a response. Doing so will tell you whether the response you have selected is effective. Proof of effectively reducing burglary (or any other crime) can be useful in persuading other area businesses to join collaborative efforts to reduce crime throughout the community. Your

measurement may also provide evidence that the strategy is not reducing burglary as you expected, suggesting an adjustment to the response is in order. While you may note improvements immediately, it is advisable to wait at least a few months after implementing a response to see whether it has had an impact. The chart below outlines ways that you can measure the state of your burglary problem, outcomes that will indicate whether the retail burglary problem has improved, and possible data sources.

When measuring outcomes it is important to note that a temporary increase in reporting of incidents to police may represent a positive outcome, indicating that community members are paying greater attention to burglary. However, reported incidents should decline over time as the number of burglaries decrease.

Measurement	Data Source	Strategic Response	Outcome
General burglary			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of burglaries Value of loss or damage (\$) Types of items stolen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local police Business records Site survey Staff interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lock possible escape routes, including fire exits and loading doors, after business hours Establish partnership with police for efficient reporting and investigations Reinforce windows and doors with grilles or strengthened glass Strengthen window and door locks Relocate valuable merchandise away from doors or windows Remove obstructions from windows to provide clear line of sight into store from street and parking lot Improve lighting of doorways and other entry points Implement early warning system with other area retailers Launch public awareness campaign to inform would-be burglars of legal repercussions of burglarizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer burglaries Fewer items stolen Decreased value of loss or damage (\$) Decreased calls for service Increased perception of safety among staff
Repeat burglary victim			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of burglaries Types of items stolen Value of loss or damage (\$) Number of points of entry Day/time of burglaries Number of suspects arrested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local police Business records Site survey Staff interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade security alarms Install video surveillance cameras to monitor entry points Improve lighting of doorways and other entry points Post signs both inside and outside of the store indicating the presence of surveillance system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer burglaries Fewer types of items stolen Decreased value of loss or damage (\$) Fewer points of entry Fewer incidents at night More suspects arrested Decreased calls for service
Burglary of electronics store			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of burglaries Number of electronics stolen Types of electronics stolen Value of loss or damage (\$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local police Business records Site survey Staff interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit inventory on-hand Install video surveillance cameras to monitor entry points or high-valued merchandise storage areas Place high-value merchandise in difficult to reach places Mark merchandise to make more difficult for resale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer burglaries Fewer electronics stolen Fewer types of electronics stolen Decreased value of loss or damage (\$) Decreased calls for service
Burglary of pharmacy			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of burglaries Number of drug items stolen Types of drugs stolen Value of loss or damage (\$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local police Business records Site survey Staff interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep narcotics or other highly regulated drugs in secure vault or cage Limit inventory on-hand Mark drugs to make more difficult for resale Install video surveillance cameras to monitor inventory shelves or secured area Post signs indicating the presence of surveillance system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer burglaries Fewer drug items stolen Fewer types of drugs stolen Decreased value of loss or damage (\$)

Measuring Your Problem: An Example

Business owners at the Winkler Shopping District (WSD) experienced a noticeable increase in burglaries. They wanted to gain a better understanding of the burglary problem before deciding on the best strategies to prevent future burglaries.

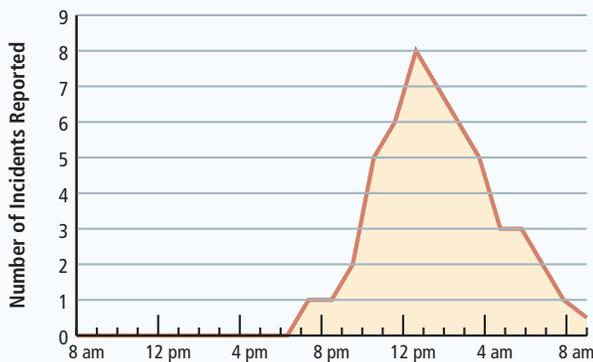
With the assistance of the police department's crime analyst, WSD first reviewed the burglary report data for the previous three months for any reported burglaries or reports of burglary alarms. The time of each reported incident was graphed to determine the most problematic time for burglaries. WSD discovered that most burglaries were reported between the hours of 10pm and 4am (see chart). Not surprisingly, this is when all the area stores are closed and there is no one on the premises to serve as a guardian over the property.

With this finding, WSD, with a local police officer, conducted a site survey of their businesses one evening after most businesses closed.

They walked along the front and rear of each building with a checklist of characteristics to note. Afterwards, their findings were used to brainstorm individual and group response strategies to prevent future burglaries.

The group decided to hire a security guard to patrol the WSD between the hours of 9pm and 6am each day. The group also developed a formal burglary incident and/or alarm protocol with the local police's assistance. This protocol established a direct contact list for the police to alert store owners or managers if they noticed any suspicious activity or signs of break-ins during the course of patrolling the area after hours. The WSD also developed a communication plan to inform each other of any incidents that occurred in their stores. In terms of individual response strategies, Store 2 recognized the need to install bright lights in the rear of the building to make any suspicious activity easier to see. Stores 2 and 3 decided to improve the security of their rear windows by installing grilles or strengthened glass (see chart).

Number of Reported Burglaries or Reported Burglary Alarms Experienced by Winkler Shopping District



Portion of Site Survey Checklist

	Store 1	Store 2	Store 3	Store 4
Bright lights near store entrance?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Clearly able to see back of store from parking lot?	Y	N	Y	Y
Doors or windows in rear of store building?	N	Y	Y	N
Bright lights near store rear entrance?	-	N	Y	-
Rear windows reinforced with grilles or strengthened glass?	-	N	N	-

How Other Communities Prevent Retail Burglary

Here are examples of how other retail establishments addressed retail burglary in their communities.

North Tryon Street Corridor Charlotte, North Carolina

In 1999, businesses and the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Police Department witnessed an increase in commercial burglaries along North Tryon Street. In conjunction with business owners, police conducted a site survey of the commercial area. Businesses worked with officers to develop environmental improvements to their businesses to prevent burglary. Changes included installing barricades to prevent “smash and grabs,” improving outdoor lighting, strengthening doors and windows with bars, and concealing merchandise from view overnight. In addition, police increased bike patrols in the area and responding officers continued to work with victims of commercial burglary to prevent repeat victimization. Bike patrols, investigators, and officers from all shifts were encouraged to increase communication amongst each other about their cases in a timely manner. Commercial burglaries declined by more than 20 percent in the year the initiative began and there was a 15 percent reduction in repeat burglary victimizations (*North Tryon Street Corridor Commercial Burglaries 2000*).

Business Community Lye, England

The West Midlands Police and Lye’s business community established the Business Against Crime (BAC) partnership in response to a disproportionate level of commercial burglaries in the area. The partnership established bimonthly meetings between stakeholders, an email distribution list for efficient information exchange, a regular newsletter for distribution to all area businesses, and a formal business watch. In addition, insurance providers developed incentives for those businesses meeting BAC quality standards. In the partnership’s first year, commercial burglary decreased by 42 percent (*Business Against Crime 2002*).

Businesses Unincorporated Dade County, Florida

In 1994, retail businesses, such as malls and shopping centers, throughout unincorporated Dade County experienced a dramatic increase in “smash and grab” burglaries. Retailers partnered with local police departments, the state’s attorney office, and the statewide prosecutors office to create a coordinated task force to respond to crime scenes, share intelligence, enhance sentencing, and improve communication between private retail security and public law enforcement. The taskforce increased the number of cases closed because of successful prosecutions, and police records indicated a 56 percent reduction in smash and grab burglaries (*Smash and Grab Task Force 1994*).



Additional Resources

- Your Local Police Department
- Your Local Safe City Partnership
- Center for Problem-Oriented Policing: www.popcenter.org
- Rutgers University Crime Prevention Service for Business: <http://crimeprevention.rutgers.edu>
- Small Business Administration Crime Prevention Series: www.sba.gov/tools/resourcelibrary/publications/SERV_PUB_CRIME.html
- Berkeley, California Police Department Crime Prevention: www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/police/Publications/publications.html
- National Crime Prevention Council: <http://www.ncpc.org>
- Small Business Administration: www.sba.gov
- National Retail Federation: <http://www.nrf.com>
- National Restaurant Association: www.restaurant.org
- National Association of Convenience Stores: <http://www.nacsonline.com/NACS/default.htm>

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