

What You Should Know
About
**COMMERCIAL
ARMED ROBBERY**



Don/Safety/Identification

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INTRODUCTION

Armed robbery is a dangerous crime that is on the increase here and throughout the nation.

It is defined as the unlawful taking of property from someone by using force or the threat of violence.

This booklet is designed to help retail managers and employees cope with this serious crime threat.

- It stresses what you can do *before* you are victimized to help *prevent* a robbery.
- It explains how the *safety* of customers and employees can be maintained *during* a robbery.
- And it details the steps you can take before, during and after a robbery to assist in the *apprehension* of the suspect.

By adopting common-sense security measures and by training your employees, you can reduce the chance that you will be robbed. And you'll increase safety in the event you are.

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ACQUISITIONS

TRAINING AID AVAILABLE

This booklet is a companion to a 16-minute Crime Watch slide-tape program entitled "Armed Robbery." Narrated by Steve Allen, it is designed for retail manager and employee training. Many local law enforcement agencies have the program. It also can be borrowed from the Washington State Film Library, AJ-11, Olympia, WA 98504.

BEFORE: PREVENTION

A *total* security program is the best way to prevent armed robbery. Some of the following recommendations may not be possible in certain businesses. But the more of them you follow, the greater security image you will present. The stronger that security image is, the less likely the robber is to select your place as a target.

Visibility

Good visibility is important for two reasons. First, it allows employees to keep an eye out for any suspicious persons who may be lingering either outside or inside your store. And it increases the possibility that someone outside will observe a robbery if it does happen. Robbers don't like to be observed. So good visibility is a vital part of your prevention program.

Your front doors and windows should be kept clear of signs or posters to allow good, two-way visibility at your cash register area. Employees should be able to see out in order to spot suspicious persons who may be casing your place. And passers-by should be able to look in at your cash register area.

If you must post signs, place them to the side of the store's windows and either high enough or low enough to retain visibility.

The outside of your business and the parking lot should have enough lighting to provide visibility at night.

Interior lighting also should provide good visibility throughout your store.

The check-out stand and cash register should be located in a central position where it is clearly visible to observers outside.



Counters should be kept low enough so that employees can see customers throughout the store. If it's not possible to reduce the height of present shelves, you can at least stock only small merchandise items on the top shelf.

Special display racks and carousels should be positioned in such a way that they do not obscure visibility.

Special mirrors can be positioned in corners or other strategic spots to help employees monitor the entire store.

These suggestions will help prevent shoplifting, also!

Cash Control

Perhaps the strongest deterrent is to practice and advertise a cash-control policy. By keeping the lowest possible amount of cash on hand and letting everyone know that, you reduce the attractiveness of your business as a robbery target.

Experience has shown that businesses can readily adjust to operating with less cash once a control policy is instituted.

You should adopt a cash limit of, for example, \$50. If a customer offers a large bill, the clerk will politely ask if he/she has anything smaller. Some stores, especially smaller ones, politely advise customers that they can't break a \$20 bill (or anything larger than a \$20) for a minor purchase, like a pack of cigarets.

Employees then should be trained to check regularly for cash over that limit. Extra cash, especially large bills, should be placed in a safe, preferably a "drop safe," or a locked money chest.

Such a chest does not have to be burglary resistant since its purpose is to discourage the robber. It can be as simple as a steel box, bolted to a counter or wall, and locked.

Most law enforcement authorities recommend a safe which the clerk cannot open alone or one which requires two keys. That fact should be posted near the entrance or some other conspicuous place and on the safe itself.

If it is not possible to have a safe, don't place extra, large bills under the cash register till. Most robbers know about that. Without a safe, figure out the least obvious alternate place to hide your extra cash until it's time to go to the bank.

These cash-control measures don't help unless you post the fact that you practice them. Post a sign, such as "\$50 Maximum Cash in Register," in a prominent place near your check-out stand and store entrance.

It's also a good idea to post a sign near the register, such as "We Appreciate Exact Change."



Banking

As an extension of a cash-control policy, you should deposit your money as often as is practical. This should never be less than daily and, preferably, should be more often.

Before you leave for the bank:

- Jot down the serial numbers of several of the larger bills as evidence in the event you are robbed.
- Look outside to see if any suspicious persons are lingering. If they are, call law enforcement and request a patrol check.

You should vary your banking routine. Carry your cash in a variety of ways, such as in a lunch sack, attache case, flight bag, pocket, etc. If you leave with a bank money bag, you could be inviting a robbery en route.

Try to bank at different times of the day so that you don't set a pattern for someone who may be casing your place. It's also advisable to vary your route to the bank for the same reason. But always go to the bank directly, without making any other stops.

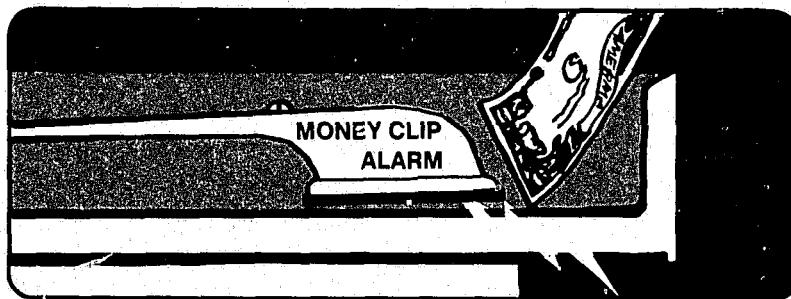
Alarms

Another deterrent factor that will contribute to your total security image is to install an alarm and to post the fact that you have one.

Alarms are available in a variety of price ranges. In choosing an alarm, it's best to get bids from two or more *reputable* firms, if possible.

The most important factor in alarm selection is the safety with which it can be activated. An alarm which requires a clerk to push a button, for example, is extremely difficult to use without arousing the robber's suspicion.

Perhaps the safest type of alarm is called a "bill trap" or "money clip." This type of alarm is installed in one slot of your cash drawer. The last bill in the slot serves as an insulator, but when it is removed in a robbery, the metal parts touch, activating the alarm. If you use a "money clip" alarm, it should be installed in the slot of one of the larger denominations — for example, the \$10.00 slot. In the event of a robbery, those bills should be pulled first so that the alarm is activated as soon as possible.



Many law enforcement agencies have procedures for alarm verification and robbery response. It's advisable to find out what they are so that you'll know what to expect in the event of a robbery.

Suspicious Persons

All employees should be trained to be alert for suspicious persons. Remember, such observation will be more effective if you have good visibility both outside and inside.

Outside, parked cars and telephone booths are among favorite observation posts for casing a business.

Inside, clerks should be alert for "customers" who seem to be loitering or glancing around the store while appearing to shop or browse through a magazine.

Robbers don't like to be noticed or to have personal interaction. Therefore, it's a good idea for an employee to greet all entering customers politely, look them in the eye and ask if he/she can be of some help. This is, of course, a good business practice anyway.

If a clerk spots a suspicious person either outside or inside, call law enforcement and ask for a patrol check.

For this reason, post your law enforcement agency's emergency telephone number on or near all of the phones in your business. (Crime Watch emergency number stickers are available for this purpose.)

If you have a surveillance camera and the suspicious person is inside, it's a good idea to activate the camera for several frames. Such photos would be valuable evidence should the person return later for a robbery. (Your crime prevention officer can give you more information on surveillance cameras.)

Check References

A surprising number of armed robberies involve former employees. For that reason, authorities recommend that you screen applicants as carefully as possible before offering a job. Ask for and follow up on character references and, especially, former employers. A few phone calls may save you a variety of problems later on.

It's also a good idea to invest in an inexpensive camera. Take a snapshot of each new employee and keep it in the personnel file. (If you have an employee bulletin board,

you can post the photo and an introductory welcoming note for a few days.)

A photo could help law enforcement identify a past employee who has come back to rob you. And the knowledge that such a picture exists just might discourage the potential robber.

Opening/Closing Times

Opening and closing times are especially vulnerable to robberies. If at all possible, have two persons on hand at both times.

At opening time, one person should enter the store and check to see if it has been disturbed overnight.

Before closing, check the office, back rooms and rest rooms to make sure no one is hiding there.

Side/Back Doors

Side or back doors should be kept locked at all times to prevent a potential robber from entering undetected. Ask employees to use the main entrance to avoid the chance that a back door will be left unlocked accidentally.

Storage Rooms

Robbers sometimes lock employees in storage rooms. Therefore, it is advisable to install a lock that can be opened from the inside and to keep an extra key there.

For the same reason, if you have an alarm, consider installing a button in the back room.

Weapons

It may occur to you to keep a weapon at the business. Virtually all authorities strongly recommend against it. The chances of injury . . . or worse . . . are just too great!

Credibility

Don't be tempted to use phony signs or equipment. The use of a phony surveillance camera, for example, can destroy the credibility of all of your other security precautions.

BEFORE: IDENTIFICATION

Here are two simple steps you can take at no cost to help in the apprehension and conviction of a suspect.

Bait Money

Take several dollar bills and write down their serial numbers. Keep the record in a safe place. Then place these recorded bills at the bottom of a till section holding one of the larger denominations — for example, under the \$10 bills.

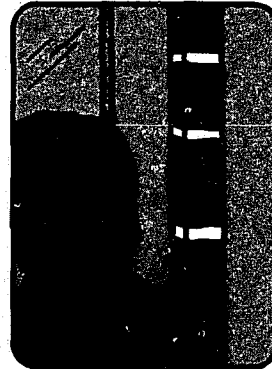
Don't use the bait money for normal transactions. But, of course, it should be given to a robber along with other money.

Your record of the serial numbers could help track the robber and will be proof that the money was stolen from you.

Height Markings

Place markers at the main entrance that employees can use to help gauge the height of a robber as he leaves your business.

All you'll need is a few pieces of colored tape. Place tape in strips about an inch high at the 5', 5'6" and 6' heights. Vary the color of the middle tape, at least, so that there is no confusion.



DURING: SAFETY

Even with a strong security program, there will always be some chance that a robbery will occur.

Robbery is a potentially explosive confrontation. Yet most robberies take but two or three minutes. It's imperative that everyone involved in a retail operation be taught how to handle those few minutes in a way that will promote the safety of employees and customers.

For that reason, it's advisable to include in your training a mock robbery. Walk and talk personnel through the steps of a robbery, remembering the following things.

The Robber

The robber is most likely to be a young male. In most cases, he will be armed with a deadly weapon, usually a handgun or sawed-off shotgun.

The robber will be a bundle of nerves. He is likely to react to any act which comes as a surprise or appears threatening.

All law enforcement experts agree: This is no time for impulsive heroics. Your percentages are not good. The stakes are not worth serious injury or death.

It is a fact that more injuries occur in robberies in which a weapon other than a gun is used.

Once a robbery begins, there is only one mission: maintain safety until the robber leaves.

The Employee

The employee should be trained to act according to these time-tested recommendations:

- Be as polite and accommodating as possible under these trying circumstances.
- Don't appear to be stalling. Convey by actions and/or words that you will cooperate.
- Do *exactly* what he asks. If he asks for tens and twenties, for example, give him those only.
- Tell him in advance if you need to make any move, especially one he doesn't expect. If he wants the money in a bag and you have to reach below to get one, tell him what you are going to do.
- Do not try to use an alarm, especially of the hand- or foot-activated type, unless you can do so without any obvious movement which might cause the robber to react in panic.

As difficult as it may seem, these recommendations will promote safety and get rid of the robber in the fastest possible time. Again, this will be easier for employees if they have role-played a mock robbery.

DURING: IDENTIFICATION

While the primary concern should be to follow these safety suggestions, clerks also should be aware of what they can do to help identify the robber.

Demand Note

Any note which the robber might give could be valuable for handwriting and fingerprint evidence. Try to slide any note out of the robber's reach in a casual way, handling it as little as possible.

Suspect ID

Try to observe the robber in as normal a way as you can under the circumstances, without staring obviously.

The more you can remember, the more helpful it will be to law enforcement. The most important points: color of hair, eyes and skin . . . facial features . . . approximate age, height and build . . . any unusual markings (scars, tattoos, etc.) . . . mannerisms or speech peculiarities or accents . . . jewelry . . . clothing.

Physical features and mannerisms are more important than clothing because the latter can be changed or discarded, especially caps or jackets. Jewelry is less likely to be discarded.

A suspect identity chart appears on page 12. You can make photocopies of that chart and keep them near the check-out stand for later reference.

Weapon ID

Although information about the weapon is helpful to law enforcement, it is not practical to train employees in technical detail.

However, anything they can remember about the most common weapons would be useful. Also try to note which hand is holding the weapon.

SUSPECT ID CHART

(Use this page to make photo copies for your store)

HEIGHT _____

SKIN COLOR (RACE)

VOICE/SPEECH

BUILD

SCARS & TATTOOS

CLOTHING

SEX: _____

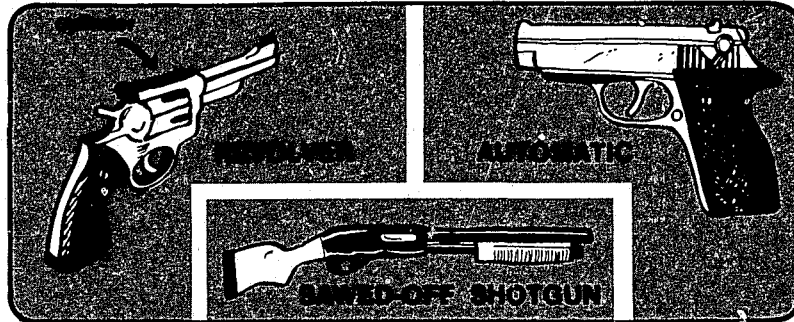
EYES

FACIAL HAIR

JEWELRY

APPROX. AGE _____





The most prevalent weapons are handguns. There are two basic types:

- Revolver:** The distinguishing feature is a cylinder in the middle which revolves to put the bullets into position.
- Automatic:** These are flat-sided — no cylinder. The bullet clip is in the grip, where you can't see it.

Rifles and shotguns also are used in robberies. The shorter, sawed-off variety of shotgun often is used. If any type of rifle or shotgun is used, police would especially like to know that for safety considerations in pursuit and apprehension. These weapons have greater range and are more damaging than handguns.

Bear in mind that just because you can't see a weapon doesn't mean that the robber doesn't have one concealed.

Departure

As the robber is leaving, continue to obey his directions exactly until you know he is out of the store. Do **not** try to follow him out of the store.

AGAIN, IT CANNOT BE EMPHASIZED ENOUGH TO COOPERATE AT ALL TIMES WITH THE ROBBER. DON'T TRY TO TAKE THE LAW INTO YOUR OWN HANDS. SOME OF THE BIGGEST HEROES AREN'T AROUND TO TELL ABOUT IT TODAY.

AFTER: EVIDENCE & IDENTIFICATION

1. Once the robber is outside, try to watch through the window. Try to note the type of get-away vehicle, whether or not there were any accomplices and the direction of escape. If it is possible to see the vehicle's license number, write it down. (Once again, the visibility factor is important.)

2. Then call law enforcement *immediately*, using the emergency number posted by the telephone. Do this even if you already have activated an alarm.

State your name, address and telephone number and what happened. Stay on the line until they tell you to hang up.

3. Next, close the store if at all possible. Lock the door if you have a key.

Do not discuss details of the robbery with fellow employees, witnesses or anyone else.

4. Ask any witnesses to stay until police arrive. While they wait, encourage them to write down what they remember. If they can't stay, get their names and addresses so police can reach them later.

5. Next, try to protect any fingerprints or other evidence. Use a box, bag or anything else handy to cover or block off any merchandise, counter area or door handle which the robber may have touched. Don't touch those things yourself.

6. Try to recall as much as you can about the robber's appearance, speech and mannerisms. It's best to make notes on these points as soon as possible.

7. Then you can step outside the store to meet the police when they arrive. That way, they'll know that the robber is gone and you are safe. This practice may vary in some jurisdictions, which is another reason to find out the Robbery Response Procedure of your law enforcement agency.

Investigating officers will know what to ask you. Use your notes to help answer their questions as fully as possible.

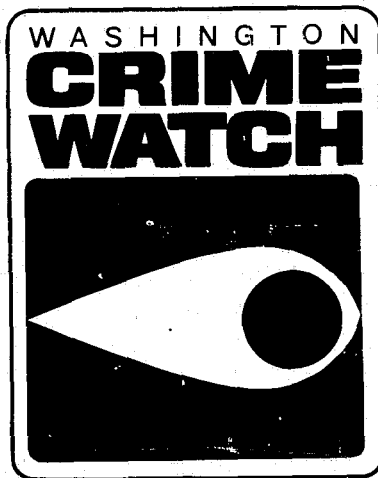
Get the recorded serial numbers of your bait money and give that to them too.

Let the police answer any inquiries from the news media. Do not discuss the amount of money taken with anyone except law enforcement. Ask investigating officers to keep the amount of money confidential.

SUMMARY

The best defense against the frightening crime of armed robbery is to make your store and staff security conscious. Don't wait until it's too late!

NOW IT'S UP TO YOU!



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