

Parking Lot Safety FactSheet

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Street Robberies

Robberies can happen anytime and anywhere. They occur in both business and residential areas in urban, suburban, and country settings — anyplace a robber has an opportunity to strike. The most common locations for these “street” robberies are parking lots, shopping centers, streets, and malls. Surveys show that almost two-thirds of street robberies occur between 3 p.m. and midnight. While street robberies happen year round, they peak during certain periods, such as the holidays. Purse snatchings and other street robberies go up in November and December as criminals prey on shoppers, carrying money and gifts. (They also go up in the summer, when more people — criminals and victims — are out on the streets because of warm weather and vacations.)

Business owners should be aware that street robberies can hurt the business. When customers fear being robbed at a specific location, they will avoid that location and head for a “safer” area. There are steps business owners and employers can take to discourage street robberies in a specific area and create a safe community for customers and neighbors!

- Light the parking lot and area immediately surrounding the store with several bright lights to eliminate shadowy areas where robbers could hide.
- Place video cameras in the parking lot and put up signs announcing their presence. Change the videotapes regularly. A tape used more than four or five times gives poor quality results and investigators may not be able to get useful “still” photos from it for the investigation.
- Keep windows clear of signs so employees can see any suspicious subjects outside the business and report them to police. Teach employees to notice suspicious subjects and vehicles, noting physical appearance, clothing, distinctive characteristics, and vehicle license plate numbers.
- Discourage loitering by placing “no loitering” signs outside of the store, and enforce the signs

by calling police for chronic loiterers. Don’t be reluctant to call law enforcement for fear of “bothering” them. Loitering is against the law and it undermines the quality of life in a community. Law enforcement agencies want to take action against it.

- Limit the number of pay phones near a business. Contact the company that manages the pay phones and request that the phones be unable to receive incoming calls.
- Get to know other area business owners and your local law enforcement agency. By working together, the responsibility of promoting a safer shopping environment for customers is shared.
- Establish a phone tree with other businesses in the area. If a suspicious person loitering is seen outside a business or nearby, call 911, and then call other businesses nearby. A network such as this can be a tremendous deterrent to crime.

It is also very helpful to stay in touch with police officers serving the area. The police want to help and want to stay in touch with businesses. Often local business groups sponsor security meetings in cooperation with the nearest law enforcement agency. These events provide the opportunity to share information on crime trends in the area. They also provide an opportunity to network with other local businesses and employers to discuss a wide variety of issues, not only crime.

Following these steps will help minimize the threat of robberies in the area and cause customers to feel safe while patronizing the business.

Remember to practice safety. Don’t learn it by accident.

This fact sheet was published with information from the Baltimore County, Maryland Police Department and the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers’ Compensation and is considered factual at the time of publication.

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