

Overview

Law enforcement agencies in major cities across the country have reported “flash mob” thefts targeting businesses to include high-end retailers, jewelers, pharmacies, sporting goods stores, convenience stores, and cannabis dispensaries. Large groups of criminal actors engage in coordinated planning on social media sites, arrive at the target location on foot or in vehicle caravans when the store is open or closed, and are often armed with burglary tools to break into the location and into product displays. Typically, the criminal actors flee the scene within a few minutes.

Indicators and Best Practices

The indicators and practices below are to assist staff in recognizing potential preparatory actions for future criminal activity. If safe, document in detail any suspicious activity and report it to local law enforcement as soon as possible.

Please note, actions listed below may not be criminal. However, such behavior may be indicators of pre-planning of large group criminal activity. Heightened awareness is encouraged.

Possible Indicators of Pre-Planning for Criminal Activity	Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions about staffing and security • Observing opening and closing procedures • Testing/opening emergency exits • Entering unauthorized areas of the property • Bulk thefts / purchases of blunt objects / cutting tools such as bolt cutters, crow bars, hammers, etc. • Thefts or missing keys, access cards, security device removal keys • Photographing security devices • Vehicles with obstructed or missing license plates • Excessive clothing used to mask identity • Clothing not consistent with season/weather • Caravans of idling vehicles in front of entries/exits • Cars and vehicles with paper licenses plates or no plates at all • Large, coordinated crowds • Propping doors open • Social media posts encouraging coordinated criminal activity at businesses • Observance of out of state license plates, care should be taken to log • Individuals carrying large bags or totes that can be used to store items targeted for theft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a point of contact with Law Enforcement • Build communication with local police and request patrol checks • Register with local police and office of emergency operations to receive notices • Maintain awareness of local/regional crime trends • Establish business community crime watch contact groups • Place private security / police near entrance and exits in visible locations, confirm reporting of suspicious activity • Document suspicious activity and contact police when observed • Develop and regularly discuss an emergency plan • Adjust store access after dark and at closing • Create a buffer area between street access and store entrance • Consider preventative measures to limit access to multiple high-ticket items • Place less expensive items on display • Regularly confirm security cameras are in working order and regularly back up if repairs required, expedite work • If possible, share CCTV feeds for exterior cameras with local law enforcement and be able to share internal images upon request • Shut down access to parking lots during overnight hours • Remove and secure high value merchandise from display cases during overnight hours (place in safe) • Encourage retail tenants to take additional security measures within their spaces • Stay alert

If a “Flash Mob” Theft Occurs

- Direct store staff and customers to stay clear of perpetrators. Call 911 as soon as possible to report incident
- Note details of assailants, tactics, and getaway vehicles if possible
- If CCTV has captured images of individuals, make back up tape and offer to law enforcement