



A Guide to Robbery Prevention and Response

**Lee County Sheriff's Office
Violent Crimes Unit
Community Response Unit (CRU)**

Disclaimer: If you see something, say something, make the call! If you are a witness to a crime, contact the Lee County Sheriff's Office or SWFL Crime Stoppers at 1-800-780-TIPS (8477).

Robbery Prevention

Robbery is a crime against your person rather than against your property. If someone breaks into your home or business and takes property from the premises, the crime is called a burglary. However, if you are confronted by an individual on the street or in your home, car or business and force is used or threatened against you, you have become the victim of a robbery.

It is important to remember two things:

1. Robbers want one thing – your money or property – and they want it quickly.
2. Robbery is a risky business and robbers are usually nervous. You do not want to delay a robbery in any way and increase the potential for violence. Give the robber what he or she wants and do it quickly.

Do not risk your life, or another person's life, for property!

Be Alert

Robberies occur at predictable times,

Businesses - Opening and closing periods are particularly vulnerable times due to low staffing and large amounts of cash on hand. Lunch hours are primary times for the same reasons. Robberies increase during the holiday season due to the increased cash volume and the presence of large crowds that distract and preoccupy store and company personnel.

Individuals - Be aware of their surroundings, especially during nighttime hours; when possible, walk-in pairs or in a group.

Robberies are often crimes of opportunity and any steps one takes to lessen those opportunities, the better.

Report suspicious activity,

If you observe an individual or occupied vehicle lingering around your business for a time, or in a manner that makes you suspicious or uncomfortable, write down the license number, the color of the car, and description of the individual and call the Lee County Sheriff's Office non-emergency number (239-477-1000). Be sure to inform other employees of your suspicion.

Visibility

Good visibility allows employees to be aware of suspicious activities outside the store.

It also increases the chance passerby's will observe robberies taking place inside the store.

Individuals should walk in open, clear areas with others when possible (during daytime hours or in well-lit areas).

Businesses should keep doors and windows clear.

Post any necessary signs to the side, top or bottom of the display windows to allow maximum visibility into and out of the store.

Locate the cash register in a central place.

Keep it in clear view of the door, with the customer's back to the entrance. The register should be visible from the outside.

Keep counter displays low; this allows employees to see over the top. You can also rearrange displays to allow surveillance up and down both sides of each aisle.

Place wide-angle mirrors in strategic locations to assist with visibility in blind areas of the store.

Make sure interior lighting provides good visibility in the store at all times.

Outdoor lighting should be even and directed toward the sides of the building, not outward where glare can create hiding places for robbers.

Cash Control

Businesses should not keep unnecessary amounts of money in the till.

Individuals should refrain from carrying large sums of money.

Keep only the amount you will need to conduct normal business and transfer the rest to the bank or a safe. Provide an anchored drop-vault for employees and do not provide them with the key or combination to the safe. Post the fact that you use a drop-vault and, therefore, cannot make change for large denominations.

Drop all checks and food stamps.

Allow customers to see you do this and explain why. Ask customers for exact change or the smallest bills possible.

During the evening, take even greater precautions.

Check to see that outside lights are on and working. In money order sales, collect money and make your drop before printing the money order. Open unused register drawers and tip them for display.

Make trips to the bank often, varying travel times and routes to reduce predictability.

Carry money in a disguised container and have someone accompany you when possible. If you are making a night deposit, do not approach the deposit unless it is clear of other people. For high-risk areas, or when transferring considerable amounts of cash, consider employing an armored car service.

List some serial numbers from larger bills before going to the bank.

Be aware of any suspicious persons lingering near the store. Call 9-1-1 if necessary.

Drive or walk directly to an open business, police or fire station, if you feel you are being followed while transporting money.

Post store policy that no more than some pre-determined amount (often \$25 to \$50) is kept in the register at one time and that the store will accept no larger than \$20 denominations.

When the clerk receives the \$20 bill, it should be dropped immediately. Never place large bills in the drawer under the tray. Robbers know this practice.

Building Security and Security Devices

Control access to the building.

Keep all doors locked, except for the main entrance. Ask employees to use the main entrance.

Install a lock on the back room door that can be unlocked from the inside.

Supply this room with an extra key, a phone, and a panic button. This will enable an employee to summon help if locked in during a robbery.

Create a sense of territoriality: People should feel they are on your turf when they enter the store and not free to do as they wish.

Install a door signaling system like a buzzer/bell to alert staff of new arrivals.

Use signs inside and outside the store to emphasize your security policy on limited cash on hand and employee inaccessibility to the safe.

Silent “hold-up” alarms should be considered.

Alarm signaling devices can be installed on the floor and tripped by foot, wired to a money clip in the till, hidden under the counter or inside an office or freezer, among other possibilities.

Identification

Greet each customer.

Establish eye contact and remember their general appearance. Good customer service discourages hesitant robbers, as well as, other thieves. This attention to detail conveys control and puts people on notice they have been observed and can be identified later.

Place height markings along the vertical frame at the entrance. This allows employees the ability to tell how tall the robber is at a glance.

Consider installing a quality video camera and recorder kept high on the wall, but visible.

Do not use fake cameras. Robbers know the difference. Have several cameras connected to the system, some visible and some not. Only the managers should have access to the footage.

Policy Considerations:

Check references of prospective employees. Do a background check of previous employers.

Keep a file on all employees, including their pictures. Past employees know the store procedure and where money is kept. They sometimes share this information with others who use it to plan robberies at the store. Pictures of suspects are much more useful than verbal descriptions.

Re-key locks and alter safe combinations or codes when employees are dismissed for cause.

Response to Robbery

During the Robbery

Remain calm.

Most robbers do not wish to harm their victims. They are only interested in getting money or property. The calmer you are, the less chance there is of the robber becoming agitated or dangerous. This also increases your chances of getting a more accurate description of the robber and being of greater assistance in the robber's apprehension.

Do not argue, fight, surprise or attempt to use weapons against a robber.

The suspect has already taken a major risk by entering your store and is usually as frightened as you are. Because of this, additional provocation on your part could make the situation worse. Therefore, give the robber exactly what he or she wants and do it quickly. Do not take unnecessary chances with your life.

While you should cooperate with robbers, don't volunteer any assistance.

Don't give all the money if the robber only asks for \$10's. Don't give checks voluntarily.

Activate silent alarms or other security devices if you can do this without detection.

Be systematic in your observations.

Watch the robber's hands. If the robber is not wearing any gloves, anything he touches might leave good fingerprints.

Look the robber over carefully. Mentally note as many details as possible until you can write them down. Compare the robber with yourself. Is he taller, heavier, older...and so on.

Notice the type and description of any weapons used. Glance at the weapon only long enough to identify it. Look at the robber from then on. Make no sudden moves and don't be heroic.

If it can be done safely, observe the direction the thief takes in leaving the scene.

Where a vehicle is involved, concentrate on the make, model, year, color, license plate number and issuing state.

After the Robbery

Call law enforcement immediately.

If you act quickly, Deputies might be able to catch the suspect and recover your money. When you dial 9-1-1, the procedure is always the same. You will be asked if your emergency involves police, fire or medical. Request police. Then briefly indicate to the call taker what the problem is, when it happened, where you are, who did it, who needs help and whether there were injuries or weapons involved. Remember to stay on the phone with the emergency call taker. After calling the police, keep your telephone line clear until the Deputies arrive. The officers may need to call you.

Lock all doors and allow no one in. Ask witnesses to remain on the premises until Deputies arrive. Do not touch anything the robber may have touched.

Do not discuss what happened with any other witnesses. Your own impressions should be kept untainted until you have talked with authorities.

Complete an incident-suspect-vehicle description statement while waiting for Deputies to arrive. The responding Deputy will want this information immediately to broadcast to other police cars in the area. Be as complete as possible. Consider using a recording device (e.g. cellphone) to preserve your first impressions. Sometimes you will be trembling too much to write quickly or may feel more comfortable verbalizing the episode than writing about it.

Finally, remember that robbery response strategies require planning and coordination between employees and management.

Give some thought to how you might react in a robbery situation and discuss your concerns with co-workers and employers. Common sense, caution, and adherence to established policies and procedures can reduce the amount of money stolen and minimize the chance for injury and loss of life.