



# St. Joseph County Sheriff's Office



## Armed Robbery Prevention and Procedures

Armed robbery is one of the most serious and potentially dangerous crimes committed in the United States today. A robber commits a hold-up because he or she believes that their profit will be worth the risk. By decreasing the possible profit and increasing the risk of apprehension, potential victims can reduce their chance of becoming a target. Personal safety is always the most important consideration when planning how to react to an armed robbery. This document provides basic information that can and will diminish the chance of becoming a victim

### What to Do Before You Are Robbed

Businesses must face the possibility of robbery on their premises realistically, and they should give security training a high priority. Employees should be trained in the latest methods of robbery prevention, which will improve their chances for safety and their ability to provide information that could help in the apprehension of the criminal. In addition, this preparation can lessen the emotional after effects of being involved in an armed robbery.

#### **Opening and closing procedures should be established. These could include:**

- Have several employees present when opening and closing the business.
  - Inspect the business for forcible entry before entering the business.
  - One employee searches the premises before admitting others. If all is clear, the employee entering the store first can signal the companion with some prearranged sign.
  - At closing make sure no one is hiding in the business.
  - At closing one employee can enter the parking lot first and can signal the companion with some prearranged sign if it is safe.

#### **Every business should operate with a cash protection system.**

Each employee handling cash should be trained in the various possible types of attack, and the employee should follow good cash handling practices. The cash system should work two ways by protecting both lives and money. Periodic checks should be made to be sure all cash protection rules are being followed. By following these cash handling procedures, the business will make it a less attractive “mark” and limit the robber’s profit while reducing the business’ potential losses.

- Keep a minimum of easily accessible cash on hand, both in cash drawers and in the safe. During evening and late night hours of operation, cash levels should be kept to a minimal amount per cash register (\$50 or less) to conduct business. Transactions with large bills (over \$20) should be prohibited. Use special quick-deposit drop safes in which money can be easily deposited when there is an accumulation of funds. Keep reserve funds locked in a money safe and deliver new funds only when required.
- Use a money safe that requires more than one employee to open and remove daily receipts. Always lock money safes after the day’s operating funds are obtained. Serious loss can be reduced by having special separately locked inner compartments or lockers where the change funds are maintained. Dual control of safes and two-key inner compartment money safes require at least two people to open the door, thus helping to prevent robberies.

- Try not to open the cash safe too often. Do not maintain more surplus cash in the store than is absolutely necessary.
- Always keep money out of reach of customers.
- Make sure employees do not display large amounts of money. Cashiers should not balance their cash in the checkout area before closing. This procedure should be accomplished in an office or other secure area less visible and vulnerable than the checkout area. Bank teller station counters should be designed to keep cash out of sight.
- Do not allow employees to count large amounts of cash in areas visible either to the public or to other employees. Large amounts of money exposed to view represent a temptation not only to robbers but to employees and customers alike
- Exercise plenty of precautions when making bank deposits. These precautions include:
  - Try to make bank deposits during daylight hours with more than one person.
  - Vary the route to the bank.
  - Do not make any stops along the way.
  - Vary the time of day the deposit is made.
  - Disguise the currency bags in plain wrappings or in another container (i.e., brief case, etc.)
  - Vary the personnel doing the deposit, if possible.
  - Vary the vehicle used.
  - Request police or armed guard protection when handling or transporting large amounts of money.

**Physical security measures include:**

- Maintaining a well-lighted interior visible from the street. Make sure signs, displays, plants, etc. do not obstruct the view from the street of the customer service area. Maintaining visibility into the business establishment at all times is important.
- Physical barriers such as bullet-resistive enclosures between customers and employees provide the greatest protection for workers. Installing pass-through windows for customer transactions and limiting entry to authorized persons during certain hours of operation also limit risk.
- Storage rooms that has a lock that can be opened from the inside. Robbers sometimes lock employees in storage rooms. Hide a key in the room if the lock cannot be opened from the inside.
  - Marking the edge of the doorway at varying heights to identify the height of a robber.
  - Mechanisms that permit employees to have a complete view of their surroundings such as convex mirrors, an elevated vantage point, and placement of the employee/customer service and cash register area so that it is clearly visible outside the retail establishment serve as deterrents.
  - Securing the teller and cashier operations. Install barriers to keep unauthorized persons out of these areas.
  - For secure areas, use doors and gates with latches that automatically lock on closing.
  - Install a timed delay switch to turn off exterior lights after the employees have gone for the night.
  - Prominently displayed surveillance camera equipment. Be sure to have the equipment serviced regularly and to only use video tapes the amount of times recommended by the manufacturer.
  - Use a dual key, drop or delay-action time-lock safe.
  - A silent alarm system. This alarm system:
    - Could incorporate a daytime holdup feature that reports to a remote supervised area. Make sure employees know how and when, and **when not**, to activate the alarm.

- Could be unobtrusively activated by an employee who is forced to open the safe or vault.
- Including standby power and transmission method, should be tested periodically. When accidentally set off or when it malfunctions, it should be reported immediately to the police to insure an adequate response.
- Should be taught to new employees and periodically reviewed with those employees who need to know.
- Seldom used rear and side doors, windows, and other accessible openings should be kept locked always. Doors should have viewers. Doors used for deliveries should be locked when not in use.
- Maintain good exterior lighting. Adequate outside lighting of the parking area and approach to the business during nighttime hours of operation enhances employee protection. Surveillance lighting to detect and observe pedestrian and vehicular entrances of the business can also help. Adequate lighting within and outside the establishment makes the store less appealing to a potential robber by making detection more likely.
- All shrubbery and trees, that a criminal could use to hide, should be cut back and maintained.

**In certain high risk areas or businesses, consideration should be given to the use of additional deterrents. These may include:**

- The presence of off-duty police or uniformed guards.
- The use of an armored car service for delivery and pick-up of cash.

**Maintain a list of emergency contact telephone numbers near the telephone. Have witness description forms available for employees and witnesses to complete after a robbery has occurred.**

**Vary lunch hours and coffee breaks so several employees are always on duty.**

**Employees should be trained to watch for and report suspicious actions of people inside and immediately outside the premises. Don't hesitate to call the police when worried about a potential risk. Should the person leave before the officer's arrival, write down the description of the suspect and their vehicle for possible police use. A suspicious person that is seen today may turn out to be the robber who returns tomorrow. Examples of suspicious activity could include:**

- Persons monitoring business operations.
- Persons asking about closing times, volume of business, the amount of money on hand, etc.
- Persons who appear to just loiter in the area checking the business layout and operations.
- Persons who may be waiting for a lull in activity and fewer customers.

**Give every customer entering the business a friendly greeting. Look each customer directly in the eyes. A robber does not want to be identified and such human contact may spoil it for some would-be robbers.**

- Require employees ask for the identification of workers, repair people, guards, police officers, etc. before permitting entry into secured areas.
- The counter or work area should be cleaned regularly to remove old fingerprints. This increases the possibilities that a robber may leave a readable print behind. Oil or waxbased cleaners should not be used.

-Try to have at least two employees on duty always. Employing two clerks is a form of “target hardening” because it may make a robbery more difficult to complete and, therefore, more unsuitable to a potential robber.

**Don’t be tempted to use phony signs or equipment.**

-The use of phony surveillance cameras, for example, can destroy the credibility of all other security precautions. Robbers soon learn to ignore them.

**Publicize the fact that the business uses good cash protection techniques.**

- Let potential robbers know their profits will be small and their risks high by using signs to convey this message. These visual deterrents (decals, placards, signs, etc.) should explain what safe method is used (dual key, drop or time delay safe) in hopes of deterring a potential robber or explaining the method should a robbery occur.

**Many police departments have procedures for alarm verification and robbery response.**

- Finding out what they are is advisable so that the employees will know what to expect in case of an armed robbery.

## **Procedures During a Robbery**

Proper employee training of the procedures to follow during a robbery is vital to surviving the confrontation. Conduct documented training and discussion periods so that every employee knows their part and has an opportunity to ask questions. A few minutes of brief review on a regular basis will help to insure the proper reaction in case of a robbery. The overriding consideration in dealing with a robbery is to reduce the possibility of injury.

- Do not resist the robber. The money is not worth risking a life. Take no action that would jeopardize the safety of personnel or customers. Cooperate with the robber and do not try to become a hero. In most situations, robbers almost never hurt anyone who cooperates.
- Do not use or encourage the use of weapons against the robber. Introducing another weapon into the situation increases the chances of someone becoming injured during the robbery. No amount of money is worth the risk of endangering a person’s life.
- Try to inform the robber of any surprises. If someone is expected back soon or if you must reach or move in any way, tell the robber what to expect so they will not be startled. A suspicious move by an employee may trigger a violent reaction endangering the lives of many people.
- Follow the robber’s commands, but do not volunteer to help. The longer the robbery takes, the more nervous the robber may become and more apt to become violent.
- If the robber demands a specific amount of money, only give them the amount they demand.
- Try to include “bait money” along with other cash. This “bait money” could be a bundle of currency with recorded serial numbers (record the denomination, serial number and year of several tens and twenties on a piece of paper kept separate from the register) or concealed dye packs. The silent alarm may be designed to activate by the removal of the bait money.
- Try to keep customers and employees calm during the robbery.
- If the robber displays a firearm or claims to have one, consider it loaded and that they would use it.

- Activate the holdup alarm, if possible, only if it can be safely done without being obvious to the robber.
- Try to alert other employees of the situation by using prearranged signals.

**Be observant. Plan to be a good witness. Try to notice as much as possible about the robber. Make mental notes of the following:**

- The number of robbers.
- The robber's physical characteristics, including: race, sex, age, height, weight, facial characteristics (head shape, color of hair, color of eyes, shape of eyes, nose and mouth, etc.) speech patterns (i.e., accents), scars, marks and/or deformities, right or left-handed.
- The robber's clothing description
- Any names used by the robbers
- Any peculiarities exhibited by the robber (i.e., smelled of alcohol, appeared to be "high" on drugs, etc.).
- Description of any weapons used. Try to notice barrel length, barrel color, color of grips, whether a pistol is automatic or a revolver.
- If the robber uses a written note, try to place it out of sight to retain it as evidence.
- After the robber has the money, offer to have employees and customers lie down instead of waiting for the robber to decide what to do, such as knocking you down or tying you up.

## **Procedures After the Robbery**

If these steps are followed after a robbery, the business employee will be in a better position to provide information to assist law enforcement officers in arresting the perpetrator, and more importantly, in protecting the employee and innocent customers from harm.

- Establish which personnel will take certain actions if a robbery occurs. Decide now which employee will lock the doors, who will call the police, who will care for the injured, who will look for the getaway car, who will protect the evidence, etc. Don't assume these jobs will be done automatically.
- Do not chase or follow the robber. The robber may shoot at any pursuers or the police may shoot at you, too, thinking you are a robber.
- Secure the doors so the robbers cannot reenter the store. Stop business operations and place a sign on the door advising customers that the business is "Temporarily closed due to an emergency." Do not let anyone in, except emergency personnel.
- Call the police immediately. Be sure to tell them if anyone is injured so they may dispatch medical personnel if necessary. Give the police the time of the robber's departure, their description and direction and method of travel. Stay on the telephone until they tell you it's okay to hang up. The speed of reporting is critical to the apprehension of the offender.
- Care for any injured people.
- If it can be safely accomplished as the robbers leave, try to note their method of escape along with the direction of travel. If a vehicle is used, try to find out the make, color, type, license number and the state of registration.
- Try to preserve any potential evidence. Protect the scene of the crime and do not touch anything the robber may have touched. Keep people out of the area.

- Write down the description of the robber. Witness description forms can be available to fill descriptive data and other remarks or if not available, use any available paper. Do not “compare notes” with others until a police officer arrives and conducts the necessary interviews.
- Ask witnesses to remain until the police arrive. If they insist on leaving, try to obtain their names and addresses.
- Contact any other individuals who may need to be contacted (i.e., store owner, bank security, etc.). Emergency telephone numbers should be accessible and the notification policy clearly established.
- Do not discuss the crime with outsiders until police give permission to do so. Refer all questions to the police.
- Do not tell or estimate how much money was lost to the robber unless absolutely necessary. The police can list the amount taken as an “undetermined amount of cash” until the exact amount is determined in an audit. Find out and record anything else that may have been stolen. If an exact amount of cash taken during the robbery should be released to the media and they report a large loss, other robbers could be attracted to the business or others in the chain.
- Assist the investigating officers in every way possible. Cooperate with the police by being available for interviews, not being reluctant to identify suspects and giving evidence in court when notified to do so.