

## RETAIL SECTOR

### Problem:

**Violent and verbal attacks on retail staff have now reached their highest level in more than a decade, yet the retail industry contribution on alarm monitoring and systems was only 4% in 2004.**

Results from the British Retailers Consortium Annual Crime Survey, released on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2005, have highlighted that the most worrying trend 'is a continuing growth in violence and verbal abuse directed towards retail staff', which have reached their highest level in more than a decade. Figures show that in the last five years physical abuse against staff working for retail organisations, both large and small, has risen by over 50%.

According to the survey, in 2004, verbal abuse against staff has risen by 35% and physical violence by 14% over 2003. This worrying trend is seen to be increasing year on year, and as a result, over the last five years, retailers have spent around £3.5 billion trying to protect themselves, their properties and their businesses. Interestingly twice as much money and therefore double the amount of investment has been lost (£7 billion) in acts of crime. The cost of crime and measures to prevent it are costing retailers an average of £2.24bn per year.

### The figures show:

Cost of crime is up by 9%

Customer theft is up by 18%

**Violence against staff is up by 14%**

Cost contribution by retailers into crime prevention:

Security staff – 37%

**Alarm monitoring – 2%**

**Alarm systems – 2%**

### Example case of a small retailer:

Peter Gauntlet, Shopkeeper, Croydon

- shopowner for 26 years
- robbed 9 times in 26yrs (2 violent attacks)
- 2002 - wife had a knife attack
- £8,000 spent on preventing crime. This has not stopped any verbal abuse, which is a growing problem for small businesses across the UK.

### Example of a large multi-national retail organisation:

The Co-operative group (statistics taken from the groups' most recent Retail Crime Survey – 2003/2004)

- incidents of crime increased by 36%
- 9% rise in incidents of physical assaults against staff
- 40% of cases of violence against staff occur while the staff member is trying to prevent shoplifting
- £14.79m was spent on crime prevention measures in 2003/04 by Co-operative societies

### Solution to help reduce violent and verbal attacks against retail staff - Identicom

Three basic principles:

1. To help the worker raise an alert without putting them at further risk
2. To share & record the incident thereby providing valuable evidence (verbal & physical abuse)
3. To provide a measured response including the Police if required.

#### ROI for employers:

Violence leads to:

- poor morale and a poor image for the organisation
- difficulty in staff recruitment and retention
- extra cost in:
  - o absenteeism
  - o higher insurance premiums
  - o compensation payments

For employees:

- violence can cause pain, distress, disability and even death
- serious or persistent verbal abuse or threats can damage an employees' health through anxiety or stress

#### Further information

This increase in verbal and physical abuse is seen to be linked to growing incidences in 'yobbish' behaviour in society and the Government acknowledged that there is a need for tougher policing and penalties to stop it. Abuse and violence are strongly linked to substance abuse and are associated with shop theft.

Also to note that the figures shown may not reflect the true extent of retail crime because small retailers do not tend to bother reporting incidences as they think reporting will be a waste of time. There is a widespread perception that reported crime largely goes unpunished – leading many SME retailers reporting less crime, creating a vicious circle of tolerance to criminals

#### The British Retailers Consortium recommendations are:

- the Government instigate a renewed communication campaign, with the support of the sector, to raise awareness of the impact of violence against retail, sending out the messages of intolerance to such acts.
- that victims should report crime in order to aid fuller analysis of the true extent of retail crime.
- that in light of the £700 million spent annually by the sector on crime prevention measures, government should review incentives and disincentives to the supply of security products

#### Organisations to gain the support of:

1. Action Against Business Crime [www.brc.org.uk/aabc](http://www.brc.org.uk/aabc) – strives to create and support local business crime partnerships – developing a co-ordinated response and facilitating the sharing of intelligence on offending
2. BRC's new campaign – Stop Crime Against Retail (SCAR)
3. 'ShopWatch' schemes – where retail staff, by agreement with their employers, are trailing and deployed as Special Constables around the immediate retail environment. This scheme is already showing signs of positive results in terms of crime reduction and increased staff morale

4. Association of Convenience Stores [www.thelocalshop.com](http://www.thelocalshop.com) – a retail trade association for the UK convenience store sector
5. USDAW [www.usdaw.org.uk](http://www.usdaw.org.uk) this is the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

**Csrnetwork study in top G-100 companies**

**Large Food retail organisations:**

1. Co-operative Group
2. John Lewis
3. GUS
4. Boots Group
5. J Sainsbury
6. Marks and Spencer
7. Tesco
8. Sommerfield
9. Dixons Group
10. Kingfisher
11. Next
12. Kesa (Comet)
13. Asda
14. Wm Morrison
15. Woolworths Group