

SHOPLIFTING IN LIQUOR RETAIL

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Private liquor store owners across British Columbia are reporting a concerning rise in shoplifting. Shoplifting not only means financial loss for your business, but also poses significant safety risks to your staff and customers.

Preventing theft is challenging and complicated and needs to be handled carefully to avoid liability risks. Continue reading for practical guidance and an overview of considerations, from staff safety and morale to liability risks.

While it is impossible to eliminate theft, you can take steps to reduce shoplifting and mitigate risk.

It is important to note these insights are based on general best practices and recommendations. Given the unique circumstances of theft in liquor stores, we strongly recommend you seek expert advice from security professionals, legal authorities, and local law enforcement to tailor strategies to your specific needs.

RESOURCES

- [ABLE BC](#)
- [Rising Tide Consultants](#)
- [Thrive Liquor & Cannabis Advisors](#)
- [Sting Investigations](#)
- [Avoiding Liability for False Imprisonment - Citizen's Arrest and Shopkeeper's Privilege](#)



What can I do to prevent theft in my liquor store?

1. INSTALL SECURITY CAMERAS

Place visible security cameras throughout your store to monitor patron activity. Ensure cameras cover critical areas such as entrances, exits, high-value product sections, and cash registers.

2. TRAIN EMPLOYEES

Train your staff to be vigilant and attentive to suspicious behavior and to report this behaviour to managers immediately.[1] Implement customer service techniques that have multiple staff on the floor and engaging with patrons. Greeting patrons and 'sticky service' can reduce opportunities for theft.

3. IMPROVE STORE LAYOUT AND VISIBILITY

Arrange your store in a way that maximizes visibility and minimizes blind spots so staff can easily monitor patrons. Keep displays organized, avoid excessive clutter, and keep shelves faced. Ensure your store has proper lighting inside and out, including nearby pedestrian and parking areas. Well-lit areas increase visibility and discourage theft.

4. SIGNAGE

Install signage that shows the store is monitored by security cameras. Signage can also be used to explain the consequences of shoplifting.

5. ENGAGE SECURITY PERSONNEL

Depending on size, location, and budget, security guards or loss prevention officers (LPOs) can be a beneficial theft prevention strategy. [2] Security personnel actively monitor patrons, deter thieves, and respond promptly to incidents. In some circumstances, LPOs can lawfully detain shoplifters on site until authorities arrive.[3]

6. ANTI-THEFT DEVICES

Implement anti-theft devices such as bottle locks, electronic article surveillance (EAS) tags, or locked display cases for high-value or easily pocketed items.

7. MAINTAIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

Communicate ongoing issues, share information on suspicious activities, and collaborate on crime prevention initiatives with local law enforcement.

8. OBSERVE LIQUOR LICENCING REQUIREMENTS

Ensure all staff have taken the Serving It Right certification and are aware of their obligations under the Liquor Control and Licencing Act, including the removal of intoxicated and unruly guests.[4] The failure to monitor for and respond to intoxication or disorderly behaviour both increases the risk of theft and constitutes a breach of liquor licencing requirements.

What should I do if I suspect an individual is shoplifting?

1. Do not confront the individual directly. Instead, observe them discreetly.
2. Inform management or security personnel.
3. Make note of as many details as possible.
4. Record suspected and confirmed theft in your incident log.

[1] Policies should specifically prohibit staff from verbally confronting shoplifters, and instead require employees to contact law enforcement as soon as possible. If store policies use vague language, such as "prevent shoplifting" or "prevent known shoplifters from returning," liquor stores face a greater risk of legal liability if staff confront the individual and the situation escalates, leading to injuries.

[2] Security guards and LPOs must hold a valid security worker licence under the Security Services Act (SSA). If security personnel do not hold a valid licence, stores can be fined under the SSA, and face a greater risk of legal consequences if the apprehension of a suspected shoplifter leads to bodily injuries. Store owners might find that hiring, training and supervising their own security staff can be onerous and time consuming. To minimize the legal and financial implications of directly employing security personnel, stores might prefer to contract private security firms.

[3] [This memo](#) regarding false imprisonment, sets out the relevant defences to the tort of false imprisonment.

[4] For more information regarding liquor licencing requirements, see the [Licensee Retail Store Terms and Conditions Handbook](#).

What should I do if theft occurs in my liquor store?

1. Ensure the safety of your staff and customers first. Avoid confronting perpetrators directly. Training materials and written policies should explicitly prohibit staff from confronting suspected shoplifters directly to avoid escalating the situation.[5]
2. Contact law enforcement and provide details and security footage. Make sure that security footage from the incident is preserved.
3. Record the incident in the store's designated Incident Report Log,[6] making note of as many details as possible. The report should include key details such as the date, time and a description of events, including the product(s) stolen, a description of the individual, and any action taken in response. Other details are also important, such as the names of the employees on shift and witness accounts.
4. Inform staff of the incident. If the individual returns to the store, staff should contact law enforcement as soon as possible. Avoid accusing or confronting the individual.
5. Review the incident with staff and identify if there are prevention techniques that could have been implemented.
6. If necessary, offer support to staff. [Go2HR](#) has resources on psychological and physical safety.

What NOT to do when theft occurs

- 1. CONFRONT THE THIEF DIRECTLY**
Confronting the thief can escalate the situation and potentially lead to violence. Written policies and staff training should explicitly provide that staff are not to confront suspected shoplifters.
- 2. USE FORCE OR PHYSICAL RESTRAINT**
Attempting to physically restrain or apprehend the thief can be dangerous and may have legal consequences. Leave apprehension to licenced security personnel or law enforcement officers.
- 3. ACCUSE OR PUBLICLY SHAME**
Accusing someone without concrete evidence can have legal implications and harm your store's reputation.
- 4. POST PERSONAL INFORMATION, INCLUDING PHOTOS**
Publicly displaying photographs of individuals recorded on a business's video surveillance system for the purpose of identifying alleged shoplifters may lead to lawsuits and penalties under the Personal Information Protection Act. [7]
- 5. NEGLECT TO DOCUMENT THE INCIDENT**
You must record as many details as possible in the store's designated Incident Report Log. The following details should be documented in the Incident Report:
 - a. Date and time of the incident;
 - b. A description of relevant events, including the individual's conduct, the product(s) taken, and the actions taken by staff in response;
 - c. A description of the individual, including their clothing and any other identifying features;
 - d. The names of employees on shift; and
 - e. Witness accounts and witness contact information.

[5] During staff training, and in your store's written policies, avoid vague language such as "prevent suspected shoplifters from leaving the premises until police arrive." If conduct policies can be construed as requiring staff to confront suspected shoplifters, the store faces a greater risk of legal consequences if an altercation arises and the staff member uses excessive force, or other customers are injured.

[6] Proper documentation procedures help to redress and prevent theft, but they are also required as a condition of a store's liquor licence. For more information regarding incident recording requirements, see the [Licensee Retail Store Terms and Conditions Handbook](#).

[7] Liquor stores are governed by BC's Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA), which is substantially similar to the federal Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA). PIPEDA prohibits the public display of an individual's image from video surveillance for the purpose of identifying alleged shoplifters, absent the individual's consent. As PIPA and PIPEDA are substantially similar, it is possible that liquor stores in BC could face consequences under PIPA for the non-consensual public display of an alleged shoplifter's image. The practice could also lead to lawsuits for defamation and the violation of privacy.