

The threat of organized retail crime and active shooters

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Asset protection has become one of the main focuses of businesses now more than ever. With the rate at which technology is advancing, it has made asset protection easier than it was years ago, but it is still without flaw. Regardless of the various measures being taken in order to reduce and eliminate theft, businesses still lose billions of dollars every year from outsiders as well as their own employees. Another issue that has to be taken into consideration is the ever growing problem and unpredictability of active shooters. There are various efforts being made in both of these areas.

In order to combat Organized Retail Crime (ORC), it is important to know what it is exactly and the ways in which people operated. ORC can be defined as, “ Theft and/or fraudulent activity conducted with the intent to convert illegally obtained merchandise, cargo, cash, or cash equivalent into financial gain, typically through online or offline sales”(NRF, 2013). It is important to not confuse ORC with regular shoplifting. Shoplifting can be described as singular events done by one person. They usually shoplift for personal reasons, whether it be because of something they need or just something they want. ORC is much more complex than shoplifting and the people that are involved and are usually not doing it for immediate personal reasons. ORC has various parts and different goals that people are trying to achieve. ORC normally has various levels. When people are caught boosting items at the store, they are usually the lowest level of people within the organization. While they do all of the hard work of actually obtaining the merchandise, they are paid very little if anything at all. They are usually groups or gangs that make up these ORC rings.

With just about every store having some sort of security and/or surveillance system, it can be hard to understand at times how people are able to get away with some much merchandise without being apprehended or at least noticed. While cameras, walk through security systems, security officers, etc are all helpful in deterring this time of crime, criminals still find ways around these security measures. While every group may vary in the way that they operate, there are some main methods that are widely used. “ ORC rings are clever, using designated roles such as driver, lookout, picker, packers and supervisor. They use hand signals, cell phones, GPS devices, online information to develop and transmit merchandise target “ lists,” and have “ tools of the trade,” which include foil -lined shopping bags, purses, boxes and signal jammers to defeat inventory control tags. Some use computers to replicate fake receipts for the purpose of making cash returns, while others will use fake and/or fraudulent credit cards or checks to purchase gift cards and other expensive goods”(NRF, 2013). Other ways that helps these rings become more efficient is that store employees are often recruited as well. An employee’s role can range from it being something small such as simply looking the other way and not doing anything to interfere with the boosters, or it can be more in depth such as completing fraudulent returns or giving out information about the stores security systems and procedures.

One items are successfully boosted, they are then taken to someone that is known as a fence. A fence is “ someone that converts the merchandise into cash or drugs as part of the criminal enterprise”(NRF, 2013). This when the

boosters usually get paid their fee for stealing their items and that is usually the end of their duties, except to repeat the process over and over again.

It is important to note that ORC does not only take place inside of retail stores. Theft has begun to occur more and more before merchandise even reaches stores. Cargo theft is on the rise and for various reasons. Criminals are able to get larger amounts of merchandise this way in a shorter amount of time than it would take to get the same amount of items from an actual store. One reason why this issue is becoming more and more common is due to staffing issues with companies. “ Driver shortages is leaving trucks in less secure areas. When loaded trailer sit at warehouses waiting to be picked up, it halts production. These trailers are then moved to less secure areas so that they continues their operations”(NRF, 2016). Once the trailers are moved to these less secure areas, they become a target for criminals. Gaining access to these places can easily be done by stealing a carriers identity.

Another reason would be the not so harsh consequences for cargo theft. “ Drug dealers are moving more towards cargo theft because cargo theft does not have mandatory minimum sentencing like drug offenses do” (NRF, 2016). If caught, first and second time offenders are usually released. Most are either fined or placed on probation. A crime that yields a large amount of money with minimal consequences is indeed attractive to criminals to say the least.

A third reason as to why cargo theft is on a rise is due to budget cuts within police departments. “ Cargo theft task forces are one of the first areas that receive cuts due to the fact that it is seen as a victimless crime” (NRF, 2016). Priority is given to crimes where people are actually hurt or suffer in some way, shape, or form. While no one is physically suffering from these crimes, cargo theft is far from a victimless crime.

Aside from fencers selling items to pawn shops, at flea markets, pop up shops, etc. , another way in which they sell stolen items that seems to be more efficient is online. With sites such as Ebay and Amazon, where individual people are allowed to make profiles and list items, they are able to reach more people in different areas. This is a much quicker way to get rid of stolen merchandise without the risk of being caught that comes with selling items on the street. This type of fencing and been labeled as E-fencing. According to the National Retail Federation (NRF), “ about 58% of the businesses surveyed have identified stolen merchandise on online auction sites”(NRF, 2016).

Store credit and gift cards are another way in which fencers make profit from stolen goods. They basically take the goods back to the stores that they stole it from to get a refund for something that they never bought to start with. Normally, most store will issue a refund in the from of store credit when a refund is being made without a receipt. These store credit/gift cards are then resold to people, either in person or online. Cost

According to a survey from the National Retail Federation (NRF), it was said that “ 100% of businesses surveyed believed that they had been a victim of ORC in the past 12 months”(NRF, 2016). Larger corporations are usually impacted the most simply because they have more stores, more merchandise, etc. Overall, it was found that “ retailers \$700, 00- \$1 billion in retail sales to ORC rings”(NRF, 2016). The survey also only continued to find increases in ORC and no significant decreases. It was also noted that more than half of the retailers that were surveyed said that while this is an increasing problem, they have not received any additional support from law enforcement in an effort to combat this problem. It seems as though that theft from retailers is not considered a priority or its a crime that goes overlooked for the most part. While people may think that it does not affect them, it actually does. The more that companies lose to ORC, cargo theft, gift card fraud, etc. , they have to makeup for those losses in some way. To try and control these losses, stores often spend a great deal of money on upgraded security systems, hiring security officers, etc. Another way in which stores try to make up for these losses and by raising the prices on their merchandise. This is how everyone else is affected. Consumers are literally having to pay for what others choose to steal. This puts a strain on everyone.

Another alarming trend within the United States would be active shooters. An active shooter is defined as “ An individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area” (Blair & Schweit, 2013). Active shooter incidents are nothing new, but seems that within the

past decade or so, they continue to happen more frequently each year. Between time time period of 2000-2013, “ The FBI identified 160 active shooter incidents that occurred within the United States”(Blair & Schweit, 2013). One of the thing that complicates trying to prevent active shooter incidents is that they are basically unpredictable with the exception of a few factors. “ About 70% of active shooter incidents occurred commerce and educational environments” (Blair & Schweit, 2013). The rate at which incidents occur per year have more than doubled. “ During the first seven years of the 2000-2013 time period, it was an average of 6. 4 incidents per year. In the last seven years of this study, it increased to an average of 16. 4 incidents per year”(Blair & Schweit, 2013).

It is near impossible to predict when and where these incidents occur. While research has attempted to show a correlation with the likelihood of an incident to occur by showing the number of shootings that occurred or specific days to areas and gender of the shooter, these incidents still happen. It only takes a matter of minutes for an incident to result in a large number of casualties. Police often arrive quickly to these scenes, some of which they actually exchanged gunfire with the shooter. There have been various takes on how to stop active shooter incidents from happening. The issue of gun control has been pushed now more than ever and has been met with a great deal of resistance. Most feel that gun control will only make this issue worse and impedes on their second amendment rights, while others feel is that it is necessary in order to prevent these incidents from happening.

Becoming familiar with the characteristics of active shooters helps with police being able to respond. This gives them idea as to what they are up against and what strategies will best suit the situation at hand. One characteristic is that “ active shooters are likely to engage in more than one target and their intent is to kill as many randomly chosen people possible” (PERF, 2014). This means that the likely targets for active shooters are highly populated areas such as malls, schools, colleges, stores, areas within a city that are highly populated, etc. Other characteristics of active shooters is that they are usually motivated by rage or hatred towards something. Financial gain is not normally a motive for the shootings if at all. It is for this reason that police negotiation is an ineffective response to active shooter situations, but would be a better response for hostage situations. It is imperative to note that shooters have often taken time to plot out their plans and how they will carry them out. They have spent time and money preparing for their attack, which often makes them more armed than the police are. While the area in which they choose to attack may seem to be a random attack to everyone else, the shooter has spent time becoming familiar with the area by observing various security routines, when the area is the busiest, etc. They’ve also studied what routes would be the quickest This is another advantage that they tend to have over police.

In any active shooter incident, it is up to police to control and ultimately end the situation. There is a great deal of pressure on police to be able to respond quickly and effectively in order to contain and end these situations. In an effort to improve police response, it is important to know what types of

weapons that shooters tend to use. “ In about 60% of cases, the most powerful weapon that they had was a pistol. In 27% of cases they used a rifle and in 9% of cases, a shotgun was used”(PERF, 2014).

Although active shooters tend to kill themselves, it is important that police do not always rely on this and are ready and trained to fight. Police should not only have extensive training for these situations, but they should also have the proper equipment for various scenarios. In some situations, shooters tend to barricade themselves in, making it harder and taking more time for police to reach them, especially when they are not prepared and lack proper equipment. Aside from having the proper equipment and training, it often comes down to be thinking and making life or death decisions within seconds. There are two main ways in which police police respond, which is solo entry or contact teams. “ If an officer arrives at a scene where the perpetrator is actively shooting or threatening victims, some policies provide that the lone officer can move in and stop the threat without waiting for additional officers to arrive”(PERF, 2014). When a officer moves in alone, this is a dangerous method, but sometimes there is no other choice when there is no time and lives are at risk.

Contact teams is another way in which police respond to these incidents. This is when a group of officers move through an area in search of the shooter. They are often in different formations as well. “ Rolling T or Diamond formations in which a point person determines the direction of the team, two “ flankers” or “ wings” cover threats to the left and right, and a rear guard faces backwards and makes radio transmissions”(PERF, 2014). By

having a group of officers enter in an area where a shooter is, they have the advantage of outnumbering that individual. They are able to cover more ground and see more versus just one officer entering in an area.

Officers being trained in first aid and how to stop victims from bleeding is another change that has been/being made to training. Police will reach the victims before any other emergency services are able to. If they are able to stop bleeding or administer some sort of first aid/CPR until other medical emergency response individuals are able to get to the victims, this would mean the difference between life and death.

While there are various factors that play into these incidents, a lot of time there were red flags that are often ignored when it comes to the shooter. Seeing as though the individuals are motivated by some sort of rage and hatred toward something, this often expressed by this individual beforehand. “ The key is information-sharing. People become concerned about a fellow student, or a co-worker, or a neighbor. To put the pieces together, we need to share information”(PERF, 2014). This would basically go back to if someone notices something odd, that they should say something. Just by paying attention to one’s surroundings and observing the behavior or people that a person comes in contact with on a daily basis could have the potential to prevent another active shooter incident. Shooters often post their frustrations online and express their hatred toward someone or something. This is not something that should be overlooked and should be reported.

Civilians should also know how to protect themselves from these types of situations as well as during. Most of the time, people can be in denial that an active shooter incident is in fact occurring. When they hear gunshots, they may think it is something else or hope that it is something else and do nothing initially. “ To overcome denial, we advise people to have a simple rule: If you hear something that could be gunfire, skip the denial stage, treat the sound as gunfire, and take immediate action”(PERF, 2014). It is of the utmost importance that individuals not feel as though they are helpless. No matter if a person is armed or not, thinking and acting quickly can have the potential to save not only that person’s life, but the lives of others as well.

There are various ways in which asset protection professionals can deter these threats. The main way that they can prevent theft is to make it impossible to get to merchandise that is normally stolen. Many stores have certain items that are locked up or have alarms on them the can only be accessed or removed by employees. It will require more and more people to be employed throughout stores in an effort to deter individuals from stealing. When it comes to deterring active shooters within the workforce, it is important to be able to notice certain behaviors and actions that are indicative of active shooters. This can be anything from a person openly expressing their displeasure with someone, somethings, a company, policy, government, etc. While it is ok to express opinions, when it is done to the extreme, it is then a time for concern. Employers should be mindful of employees that may have been fired, especially those that left on very bad terms than someone normally would. There should be something done to

where that person can be monitored if they exhibited certain behaviors during their employment with a company and even after they are no longer employed. In order to combat the issues of ORC and active shooters, it is going to require not only a group effort within the workforce, but the current laws in place for these actions are going to have to become more strict and come with harsh mandatory minimum sentencing.