

# Storefront crashes injure thousands, kill hundreds each year

*Brian Pia, Investigative Reporter*

Midfield, Alabama Mayor Gary Richardson showed me some protective barriers. They were installed outside the Vital Smiles dentist office following [last February's tragedy](#).

"That's solid," Mayor Richardson told ABC 33/40 News as he hit the side of one of the barriers with his hand.

"That is solid. So it's metal," I asked.

"Metal," Richardson said.

"It's concrete here," I said pointing to the base.

"Three feet deep," Richardson added.

The steel pipe and concrete barriers are called bollards. They're designed to help prevent crashes, like the one last February, from happening again. An [SUV plowed into the dentist's office killing a 6-year-old boy](#) and injuring several others.

Psychologist Malissa Smitha has been counseling Vital Smiles' employees and patients following the crash. The dentist office is picking up the tab. She says overcoming fear is one of their biggest challenges.

"I think the false sense of security that many of us have in our day-to-day comings and goings was stifled," Dr. Smitha said. "It was crashed. Just like a china plate was just thrown to a blacktop pavement. It just shattered."

## **Cars plow into buildings 60 times a day in the U.S.**

Vehicle crashes into buildings happen more often than you think. An advocacy group called the [Storefront Safety Council](#) estimates that cars accidentally plow into buildings 60 times a day across the country. The result: More than 4,000 injuries and up to 500 deaths a year.

The leading cause of the accidents: Driver and pedal error, combined with parking lot designs where cars are pointed at buildings.

Rob Reiter is the co-founder of the Storefront Safety Council.

"So if there is a design like that, what happens very often is someone coming into park hits the gas, instead of the brake," Reiter said. "Or, people who are already parked put it in drive instead of the reverse. They hit the gas and go forward into the store instead of backing out of their parking space."

## **Protecting customers and employees**

Reiter says the best parking lot designs allow for cars to move parallel to stores, not towards them.

The second line of defense: Safety bollards that can withstand 10, 20 or even 30 mile-an-hour impacts from 5,000-pound cars or trucks.

Mike Schram is CEO of [Traffic Guard](#), a company that makes safety bollards.

“The percentage of impact into buildings is a very minute percentage of the total number of buildings in America,” Schram said. “But I will tell you if you get hit by a car, and you’re not dead, you’re going to wish you had a bollard to protect you.”

### **Midfield is leading the charge in protecting people from storefront crashes**

The Storefront Safety Council says Midfield became the first city in Alabama to pass a very important ordinance following the crash here. It requires protective safety barriers in front of new or renovated buildings. Mayor Richardson hopes that sends a strong message to others.

“Sixty times a day in this country, that type of accident happens,” Mayor Richardson said. “ I think others ought to be on board on this one.”

The International Council of Shopping Centers represents the shopping center industry.

A spokesperson says they don’t provide any guidelines for establishing protective barriers for stores.

They say it’s up to each property owner to determine what’s necessary to protect their tenants and visitors.