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Ram raids: Sometimes ORC, sometimes drunken stupidity

But in all cases the cost to retailers is high

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LOS ANGELES—Every day in the United States, at least three retailers are “ram raided.” An SUV or pick-up truck intentionally plows through the storefront for a destructive smash-and-grab robbery.

No retailer is immune, but convenience stores, especially those with ATMs inside; pawn shops that advertise “gold and guns” for sale; scrap metal yards; jewelry stores and even Apple computer stores are among the chief targets, Rob Reiter, co-founder of the Storefront Safety Council, told Security Director News.

In addition to the monetary loss from the thefts, there is the cost of repairing the facility and the business downtime. But most significant, Reiter said, is the threat of physical injuries to employees.

“People can get hurt very easily, especially from flying glass. Employees can be in the store working late, or called in because the server went down,” he said. The first time two of Apple’s Genius Bar employees get run over by someone trying to steal an iPad might draw more needed attention to this growing problem, he said.

Last year, four men ram-raided an Apple store in Temecula, Calif., and made off with \$400,000 of merchandise, he said, and caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage to the store. Fortunately, no employees were inside when the incident occurred.

“You’ve got to protect your employees,” he said.

About 5 percent of all storefront crashes are intentional, although Reiter said he expects the actual number is double that. Many retailers don’t like to report crashes fearing it makes their stores appear unsafe to customers or an easy targets for other thieves, he said.

The solution is bollards and other barriers, different parking patterns and building design, he said. The high-end jeweler Tiffany & Co. has been hit a number of times by ram raiders, but has since put bollards and other barriers in place to combat the problem.

What typically happens, he said, “a guy steals an SUV or pick-up type vehicle, blasts through the store’s roll-up gate, and then three or four guys jump out and start loading up everything they can. Then they run outside to [another] waiting vehicle.”

Those are the cases most likely tied into organized retail crime. There are also the cases of “stupid drunk guys” who intentionally smash into a convenience store and steal a couple of beers and a couple of packs of cigarettes, he said. In one ATM ram-raid case in California, he added, “not the smartest guy” used his own car. He put a chain on the bumper to pull the ATM out. The bumper came off and along with it his registered vehicle’s license plate.

“This isn’t going to go away,” Reiter said. “It’s incumbent on retailers” to secure their employees and stores.

In a growing number of places, such as Houston and Atlanta, if a business wants to install an ATM they are required to put up bollards and other barriers, because police don’t have the manpower to protect all of them, he said. [St. Louis experienced a spate of similar robberies last spring.](#)

Reiter got into the business after 9/11, when he began working with enterprises to protect government, critical infrastructure, military bases, airports, shopping malls and others from terrorist attacks. “They thought Osama was going to crash into the courthouse,” he said.

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