

Plastic Bag Ban and Shoplifting

By Anthony van Leeuwen, 29 April 2013

In an article titled “*Store owners say plastic bag ban causes more shoplifting*” author Casey McNerthey (Seattle PI, 28 February 2013) reports that Seattle store owners have reported thousands of dollars in merchandise losses. The losses are blamed on thieves with reusable bags who are harder to track and monitor. The highest losses reported occurred in stores in low income areas with many homeless and transients.

According to a survey by the Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) Solid Waste Division in January 2013, 21.1% of business owners surveyed said that an increase in shoplifting occurred since the adoption of the plastic bag ban and customer use of reusable bags.

Quoting from the article: “*They enter the store with reusable bags and can more easily conceal items they steal. The reusable bags require staff to watch much more closely, and even though the store has a loss-prevention officer and more than a dozen security cameras, it's tough to tell what a customer has paid for and what they may already have brought with them.*”

By requiring customers to use reusable bags, the security posture of a retail store is *altered* increasing the problem with shoplifting and theft. In an article titled “How to Identify Shoplifters” by Shari Waters (About.com Retailing) the author describes shoplifting methods as follows: “*Many of these thieves work in groups of two or more to distract the sales staff while they pilfer. Shoplifters learn to take advantage of busy stores during peak hours or they may hit at times when employees are less alert, such as opening, closing and shift changes.*”

Shoplifters typically conceal merchandise in clothing, handbags, reusable bags, strollers, umbrellas or inside purchased merchandise. The number of people who bring handbags into a retail store is relatively small compared to the number of people who bring in reusable shopping bags. In other words, the problem of store security is exacerbated.

Reusable shopping bags can be used to hide a weapon which would be a particular concern for convenience stores (e.g. Circle K, 7-11, etc.) who are more apt to be robbed. In addition, the reusable shopping bag can be used to pilfer merchandise through a variety of schemes.

The schemes become particularly egregious if the **plastic carryout bags are banned at all retail stores**, such as stores in your local shopping mall where shoppers would carry reusable bags from one store into another as they shop!

The higher security costs and losses due to theft will be offset by higher prices. Since shoplifting losses are predominantly in low income areas, **residents** of these areas will be *disproportionately harmed*.