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## Customer clashes characterize Black Friday



LPF and NRF experts say planning, extra security staffing and collaboration with police pay off

by: Amy Canfield - Monday, December 2, 2013

CHICAGO—Two police officers tried to stop two male shoplifting suspects at a Kohls store here on Black Friday. One of the suspects slammed one of the officer's arms in a car door and drove off, dragging the officer several yards across the parking lot. Fortunately, the officer was not seriously injured before the second officer shot the suspect in the arm to get him to stop the vehicle.

In Utah, several people were trampled at a Walmart when they were trying to get tablets at Black Friday prices of \$50 each. In Virginia on Black Friday, a fight over a parking space left one man stabbed.

Other incidents also were reported nationwide, but it was the customers to blame, not the retailers, experts say. This past Black Friday was relatively safe, they said.

Retailers were well prepared, say Gene Smith, president of the Loss Prevention Foundation, and Rich Mellor, vice president of loss prevention for the National Retail Federation.

Retailers have learned over the years that they need to get law enforcement involved, and law enforcement has learned that as well, they said. That helped this year, despite the perceived pressures of the shortened shopping season.

"There are fewer shopping days out there this year, so there's a greater sense of urgency," Smith told Security Director News. "Holidays are stressful for everybody, but it's unbelievable how stressed out customers can get over a piece of merchandise."

Even with extra security in place and police on hand, "there's only so much you can do when a customer decides that they're going to get violent," Smith said.

Mellor agrees. "You can't control shopper personalities," he told SDN.

As for the incident with the police at the Kohls in Chicago, Mellor said, "Retail security directors over the years have had to get very, very strong about not chasing shoplifters. It's all about protecting those employees. All sorts of things can happen when you venture out into the parking lot."

"I think the retailers, law enforcement and mall security have all learned serious lessons. They did a good job this season. The incidents are isolated, and each incident I looked at was about customers arguing with each other. A retailer can't anticipate personality clashes. It could have been a lot worse. This was a pretty decent couple of days," Mellor said.

Smith also credited preventative actions on the part of retailers, including "doing a better job with local law enforcement." They've also provided more training, he said.

"They have taken significant steps and were staffed accordingly," he said

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