



**NorthEast Citizens Patrol**  
**5807 Harford Road**  
**Baltimore, Maryland 21214**  
Phone : 410-444-2100  
Email: [mikehilliard@harbel.org](mailto:mikehilliard@harbel.org)  
Website: [www.necop.com](http://www.necop.com)

## **How to prevent shoplifting without spending a dime**

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By J.D. Harrison

The holiday season brings more potential customers to brick-and-mortar retail stores, which the most part, means increased revenue for merchants. But more shoppers also means more potential shoplifters, which can send profit margins heading in the opposite direction.

Security cameras can prove useful at catching shoplifting suspects after they steal, but there are several preventative measures retailers can take before that happens. (Anne Arundel Police ) last year, stealing by shoppers accounted for 31 percent of retail inventory loss, costing merchants across the country an estimated \$10.94 billion, according to a retail security survey conducted by the University of Florida. Researchers found that the stores most susceptible were those selling electronics accessories, apparel, books and music, jewelry and watches, and tires and automobile parts. “Everyone thinks about little Johnny stealing a pack of bubble gum, but there are also professional gangs that target stores and steal billions of dollars every year,” Joseph LaRocca, senior adviser of asset protection for the National Retail Federation, said in an interview. “Retailers have to be conscious of both.”

But in this penny-pinching economy, few shop owners have extra cash lying around with which to upgrade to the latest overhead cameras, and they certainly cannot afford to hire additional employees or security guards to keep a close eye on shoppers.

Not to worry, said LaRocca, explaining that there are plenty of shoplifting-prevention steps that won't cost retailers a dime. Here are his top five:

**Offer top-notch customer service:** Greet customers right when they walk in the door and make it clear that you'll always be nearby if they need help. “If a shopper exhibits suspicious behavior, don't walk away from the situation,” LaRocca said. “Approach the person, and if they're a genuine customer, they may very well need help. If it's someone with some shady intentions, that's close enough to deter him or her from stealing.”

**Keep your shelves clean and organized:** Keep your display bins and shelves tidy and organized so customers know that you'll recognize if something goes missing. “When things look out of place, opportunists see a chance to get away with something,” he said. “For instance, if you walk into a store and find calculators tucked between some shelves of Levis or laying in food bins, you're going to look at that and think ‘nobody will even miss this.’”