

Elmendorf slaps cuffs on shoplifting

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Amanda Glenn

AAFES Public Affairs

Attention shoppers: if you don't have enough money for the item you want to buy and are thinking of slipping it in your pocket and walking out the store anyway — don't. Army and Air Force Exchange Service loss prevention associates have their eyes and cameras on the look out for you, and they will catch you.

Thanks to an upgraded security system that allows the LP associates to see from one end of the store to another, Ms. Sandy Gilbert, Alaska AAFES LP manager, said the Elmendorf store has seen an increase in detentions this year. "We have apprehended 69 shoplifters, preventing a total loss of \$6,181.89 in merchandise from Elmendorf AFB," she said.

Mrs. Gilbert explained that AAFES LP associates are dedicated to eradicating shoplifting incidents from the stores. In addition to the sophisticated electronics surveillance equipment, undercover detectives roam the store looking for suspicious behavior. Also, all AAFES associates are trained to observe their surroundings and report suspicious activity to LP associates.

"When our LP Associates identify individuals shoplifting, they monitor their activities from the time they select the merchandise and conceal it, to the moment they exit the facility without paying. Shoplifting is defined as someone stealing any item or even part of an item, or changing the price of an item in order to pay a lesser amount," Mrs. Gilbert said.

AAFES has a 100 percent prosecution policy for shoplifting. That means that regardless of the reason why someone took the item, AAFES detains him or her for military police to apprehend.

"Once the person leaves the facility without payment, they will be stopped and escorted back to the security office. Security Forces will take statements, recover the item, and release individuals to their units for Uniform Code of Military Justice action," she explained. "If a family member or civilian is caught stealing, the matter goes to the



TECH. SGT. KEITH BROWN

sponsor's chain of command. They could lose their privileges at the BX or be barred from the installation altogether. Whatever action is taken, they are going to lose a lot more in pay than what the item was worth."

In addition to the potential loss of privileges, the UCMJ or legal action, and the loss of respect, integrity and reputation, shoplifters will also receive a civil demand letter from the BX. The National Defense Authorization Act allows AAFES to assess shoplifters a \$200 fee for civil damages.

Mrs. Gilbert urges potential shoplifters to rethink their plans before acting on them. Shoplifting costs the individual more than they can ever get

back and costs the installation in lost morale, welfare and recreation dividends, as well as the cost to constantly improve and upgrade security systems. It's not worth it, she said. No matter what name you put on it — shoplifting, stealing, the five-finger discount — it is all wrong and AAFES LP associates are out to find and stop it.

From the cameras in the ceiling to the undercover detectives and the trained associates, big brother is watching. They've seen it all and know the signs and the excuses. Their advice: if you don't have the money for it, put it back. Once you walk out the door with merchandise in your pocket, it's too late.

Shoplifting issues at a glance

WHY PEOPLE SHOPLIFT

The thrill, peer pressure, gambling habits and flat out greed. Almost all of the people detained for shoplifting have the means to pay for what they stole. They just did not think the whole process through (they stop thinking when they get to the "free" part of the thought process, and don't give any thought to the consequences of getting caught).

IMPACT OF SHOPLIFTING

Higher prices to cover losses, possible employee cuts to reduce expenses and reduced sales mean reduced earnings, and this has a direct effect on the dollars returned to the military community in the form of a dividend.

HOW THEY ARE HANDLED

AAFES employs loss prevention associates (better known as exchange detectives) who are responsible for monitoring the store to protect AAFES assets.

Before a detective detains an individual, standard operating procedure is to observe the person selecting the merchandise, concealing the item, and then departing the store without rendering payment.

All shoplifters detained are turned over to Security Forces. There are no options to let an individual go or to let them pay for the item after the fact. All shoplifters are processed the same way.

When it comes to looking for shoplifters, specific people aren't targeted as much as certain

merchandise or sections of the store are, where individuals may go to conceal the item they are stealing. Items that tend to attract a lot of attention are electronics (software, CD's, DVD's and memory sticks), and high-end cosmetics and purses.

THE CRP

The Civil Recovery Program is part of the Federal Claims Collection Act that was amended in 2002. This amendment allows AAFES and other nonappropriated fund, federal retailers to pursue losses and administrative costs directly relating to shoplifting, theft detection and theft prevention.

The CRP is designed to help retailers offset their high merchandise losses and their added cost of security.

When a person is caught shoplifting or assisting another person in shoplifting, they will be sent a Demand Letter for \$200. They have 30 days to pay the debt or further action will be taken. This could include notifying the sponsor's unit commander and/or suspending the sponsor's check-cashing and Star Card privileges.

A criminal conviction is not required to impose civil liability.

GETTING CAUGHT

Person risks to the individuals caught include loss of BX privileges, community service, base disbarment, loss of job opportunities, career stopper (loss of rank and money), loss of scholarships and military academy appointments, and humiliation and embarrassment.

LOSS PREVENTION TOOLS

AAFES security camera systems are worldwide and are the best known.

These cameras can pan, tilt and zoom. Individuals can zoom in on information imprinted on a personal check being written at a register. There can be more than 40 cameras in a store.

With camera systems costing in excess of \$175,000, cameras are worth their weight in gold when it comes to getting recorded evidence of a crime.

■ **IRS:** The Incident Record System archives all reports for future reference worldwide.

■ **ARFIS:** The Refund System tracks and archives all information on all refunds without receipts.

■ **FRAUDWATCH:** Is a system that tracks and flags certain trends for employees who are operating cash registers. The information is then used for conducting research investigations on specific merchandise sold. Currently, there is an enormous amount of information in this loss prevention system that is used for investigating.

■ **TELECHECK:** Is a system that provides access to a system that archives "bad" checks written by individuals and cashed at an AAFES BX. Photocopies of checks are able to be accessed in a matter of minutes during check fraud and internal theft cases.

■ **MOBILE VIDEO SURVEILLANCE:** Is a mobile loss prevention team that installs covert cameras in AAFES locations to monitor suspected theft activity.